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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



**July 2011**

**Vol. 116, No. 7**



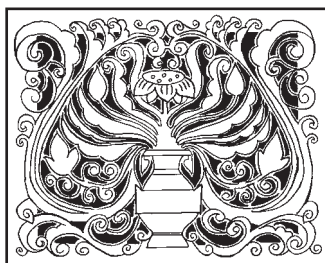
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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

Vol. 116, No. 7  
July 2011

## Contents



Amrita Kalasha

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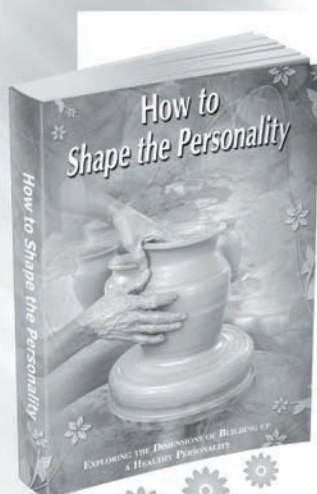
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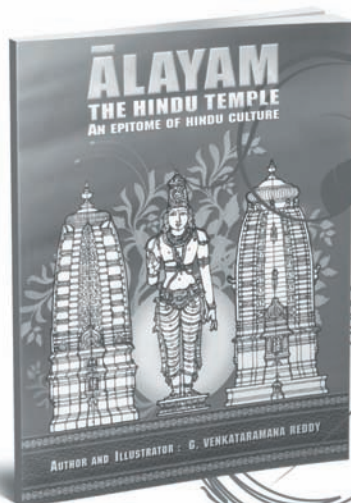
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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*



## *An Agnostic's Kismet*

July 2011  
Vol. 116, No. 7

न साम्परायः प्रतिभाति बालं प्रमाद्यन्तं वित्तमोहेन मूढम् ।  
अयं लोको नास्ति पर इति मानी पुनः पुनर्वशमापद्यते मे ॥

The means for the attainment of the other world does not become revealed to the non-discriminating person who blunders, being fooled by the lure of wealth. One who constantly thinks that there is only this world, and none hereafter, comes under my (Death's) sway again and again.

(*Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.6)

असुर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसाऽऽवृताः ।  
तांस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्महनो जनाः ॥

Those worlds of the demons are covered by blinding darkness. Those who kill the Atman (through the fault of ignorance) go to them after giving up this body.

(*Isha Upanishad*, 3)

असन्नेव स भवति । असद्ब्रह्मेति वेद चेत् ।  
अस्ति ब्रह्मेति चेद्वेद । सन्तमेनं ततो विदुरिति ॥

If anyone knows Brahman as non-existing, he himself becomes non-existent. If anyone knows that Brahman does exist, then they consider him existing by virtue of that (knowledge).

(*Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.6.1)

यो वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यविदित्वास्माल्लोकात्प्रैति स कृपणः  
अथ य एतदक्षरं गार्गि विदित्वास्माल्लोकात्प्रैति स बाह्यणः ॥

He, O Gargi, who departs from this world without knowing this Immutable is miserable. But he, O Gargi, who departs from this world after knowing this Immutable is a knower of Brahman.

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.8.10)

# THIS MONTH

No soul, however degraded, is cut adrift from the Divine. This divinity repeatedly keeps tugging at the soul to awaken it from the delusion of alienation and disorientation. **Call of the Eternal** also indicates why every soul needs to undergo periodic upheavals.



Swami Vivekananda just missed meeting **The Blessed Baba Raghunath Das** in Ayodhya, but later told Sister Nivedita what he heard about this soldier turned saint. With added information, this moving story is told by Swami Videhatmananda, editor of the Order's Hindi journal *Vivek Jyoti*, published from Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur, in its April and May 2002 issues and translated by Prof A K De.

Swami Samarpanananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, shows in **The Five Great Sacrifices: Linking Ancient and Modern Hinduism** how the concepts of yajna instituted by the Vedic sages have a profound integrating influence on the personality and society.



**Natha Pantha: Order of the Primordial Shiva**, by Dr Satish K Kapoor, is an in-depth article on this yoga tradition and its main exponents,

which prevailed in India's medieval religion and society. The author is an Ex-British Council scholar and present secretary of Dayanand Institutions, Solapur.

Elizabeth Usha Harding of Kali Mandir, Laguna Beach, California, in her narrative **Mexico Rising: The Gods Are Alive** gives a clearer and deeper picture of Mexico while skilfully drawing similarities with Indian religious history and culture, especially Divine Mother worship.



Every religion comprises three levels: the social, the doctrinal, and the spiritual. Harmony of religions should mean harmony on these three levels. Swami Bhajanananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in this section of **Sri Ramakrishna: A 'New Man' of the Age – III** takes up the third level, the spiritual, and shows Sri Ramakrishna's great contribution to religious harmony.

In the second part of **Significance of the Term Putra in Vedic Literature**, Kamalika Mazumder, MA in Ancient History and Culture and MPhil in History from Calcutta University, gauges how the Vedic Aryans interchangeably used some words like *putra* and *dubita* for offspring in general, but later, with the rise of the military class, were crystallized into 'son' and 'daughter' respectively.

## EDITORIAL

# *Call of the Eternal*

**L**IFE IN SOCIETY naturally entails being assailed by innumerable non-spiritual sensations and knowledge. The spiritual longing latent in everyone slowly becomes smothered with layers upon layers of worldly impressions, and one turns sceptical about the existence of God. This fact has remained unchanged in every age, but the process of being educated and living in today's society has an added dimension: making humans more prone to psychological alienation. Just as before, there comes a time in everyone's life when the delusive layers are torn away. It is also true, however, that as the scum covering water when pushed aside eventually returns to the same place, so all these layers of delusion return and settle to make us again our familiar selves. This is the inescapable inner story of every human being, which has been repeated, to a greater or lesser degree, down the ages, and will be so in the future as well. This rending of the delusive layers is interpreted variously in different religions as divine grace or the effect of good karma, but there is unanimity that it is a call to a higher life. Another area in which religions are in agreement is that this call comes when suffering is at its zenith and life hurls down to its nadir.

Life is turbulent; no life however comfortable is smooth sailing, nor will ever be: this is another erroneous belief one needs to reject. In this turbulence there are periodic upheavals that change the course of one's life, either for better or worse. The danger lies in mistaking these inevitable upheavals for a divine call.

Even when the call is genuine there are some who make a feeble search for answers, to finally find their desultory attempts thwarted. Others find their beastly urges standing as an obstruction before the opening visions, only to be violently thrown back to the familiar lair. Swami Vivekananda, in his characteristically powerful way, describes it: 'To us all come such thoughts in moments of great depression; but such are the temptations surrounding us, that the next moment we forget. For a moment it seemed that the doors of the heavens were going to be opened, for the moment it seemed as if we were going to plunge into the light effulgent; but the animal man again shakes off all these angelic visions. Down we go, animal man once more, eating and drinking and dying, and dying and drinking and eating again and again.' One has to pass the gauntlet, and very few are willing to undertake the pains and struggles it involves. Swamiji continues: 'But there are exceptional minds which are not turned away so easily, which once attracted can never be turned back, whatever may be the temptation in the way, which want to see the Truth, knowing that life must go. They say, let it go in a noble conquest, and what conquest is nobler than the conquest of the lower man, than this solution of the problem of life and death, of good and evil?'

Sri Ramakrishna also says: 'All men are by no means on the same level. It is said that there are four classes of men: the bound, the struggling, the liberated, and the ever-free.' Souls struggling for freedom are the 'exceptional minds'; they



have behind them an integrated sense of the phenomenal self tuned to the world around. This tuning the self to the world comes through tremendous personal sacrifices. Keeping in view the readiness to respond to the higher spiritual call the Vedic sages had instituted the daily performance of the *pancha-mahayajna*, five great sacrifices. These sacrifices would gradually condition a person to a higher life; for no one is able to say when the call will come.

There is the story of a person who responded to the call and broke free. Baba Nanak Das was only eight when seeing a group of wandering sadhus that had arrived in his village joined them and never returned home. He loved to interact with young sadhus and used to offer them anything nice he received as *bhiksha*, alms. One day a young sadhu seeing Baba Nanak Das rubbing his stomach with his hand and sweetly uttering ‘Rama, Rama, Rama,’ asked him what was wrong. ‘My stomach hurts,’ was the Baba’s reply. The young sadhu jokingly said: ‘Babaji, Rama has to come all the way from Lanka to cure your stomach ache, and there is a huge traffic jam now.’ Baba Nanak Das—his toothless childlike face bursting into a loud laughter—said: ‘Sri Rama does not travel by car; he won’t be caught in a traffic jam.’

The same young sadhu asked him if he had seen Sri Rama. Baba Nanak Das did not immediately reply but joyously went to a small souvenir shop, returned with a beautiful picture of Sri Rama and, innocence incarnate as he was, said to the sadhu: ‘I have seen Sri Rama in person much more vivid and real than this picture of my Lord.’ ‘When?’ ‘Some years ago when I slipped and was badly hurt while in the mountains. On regaining consciousness I saw Sri Rama gently rubbing his hands over me; this healed me immediately.’

Baba Nanak Das, who belonged to the Udasi tradition, followed a rigorous monastic life for

a hundred years, living in Gangotri—one of the coldest places of India—wearing nothing but two pieces of cotton cloth, one used as dhoti and the other as chaddar, and using a veranda of an ashrama to sleep, even in sub-zero temperatures. It was only during his final illness that he was lovingly persuaded to use a room in the ashrama.

Baba Nanak Das’s life is a shining illustration of how, by living on a higher plane of consciousness, souls can do spiritual good to the world and embolden others to take the spiritual plunge, when the right time comes. It is not that they become famous, but such brave souls exhibit superior spiritual contentment and love, and finally become immortal. Their lives are one massive proof of the reality of the call and of the Spirit. Such persons are untainted by hypocrisy and artificiality and are unconcerned about worldly standards. They may not know the latest discoveries of science, but they know themselves and understand the laws of divine existence. Shankaracharya speaks of such souls in the *Vivekachudamani*: ‘There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever.’

The periodic upheavals of life actually serve to integrate our personality and make us ready for the call when it comes. Even if an upheaval takes us down, it is a temporary setback, for no soul can stay degraded for long. The call for a higher life comes again and again to everyone and will stop only when we respond. The best way left to us then is to take refuge in the one who is calling, for as the Bhagavadgita says: ‘Since this divine maya of Mine, which is constituted of the *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—is difficult to cross over, (therefore) those who take refuge in Me alone cross over this maya.’



# The Blessed Baba Raghunath Das

Swami Videhatmananda

**A**FTER SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S *mahasamadhi* on 16 August 1886 Master Mahashay, or M, who later became the author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was unable to concentrate on his daily duties. He took leave from his school work and went on a pilgrimage to Vrindavan, Ayodhya, and Varanasi. On reaching Ayodhya, M visited various temples, offered worship, and then went to pay his respects to monks and holy men. He met Baba Raghunath Das, who had attained the state of a *paramahansa*. When M reached his ashrama, he found Babaji sitting joyously like a guileless child surrounded by a number of monks. Baba Raghunath Das had already received news of Sri Ramakrishna's passing away. He sympathized with M and affectionately talked with him for a long time. Consoling him Babaji said: 'My son, where will you wander? Return to the place of your guru. Meditate and think of him and sing his glories.'<sup>1</sup>

It is quite possible that Swami Vivekananda heard about this great saint from M. In July or August of 1888, during his wandering days, Swamiji went to Ayodhya via Varanasi. When he visited the Babaji's ashrama, he learnt of the saint's *mahasamadhi*. Although Swamiji did not meet Baba Raghunath Das, he heard many stories about him. Later he narrated his inspiring life to Sister Nivedita, who recorded it:

Raghunath Dass had been dead two months, when the Swami reached his Ashrama. He had been a soldier originally in the British service, and as an outpost sentinel was faithful and good, and much beloved by his officers. One night, however, he heard a Ram-Ram party. He

tried to do his duty, but, 'Jai Bolo Ram Chunder ki jai!' maddened him. He threw away his arms and uniform, and joined the worship.

This went on for some time, till reports came to the Colonel. He sent for Raghunath Dass, and asked him whether these were true, and if he knew the penalty. Yes, he knew it. It was to be shot.

'Well,' said the Colonel, 'go away this time, and I shall repeat it to no one. This once I forgive you. But if the same thing happens again, you must suffer the penalty.'

That night, however, the sentinel heard again the Ram-Ram party. He did his best, but it was irresistible. At last he threw all to the winds, and joined the worshippers till morning.

Meanwhile, however, the Colonel's trust in Raghunath Dass had been so great that he found it difficult to believe anything against him, even on his own confession. So in the course of the night, he visited the outpost, to see for himself. Now Raghunath Dass was in his place, and exchanged the word with him three times. Then, being reassured, the Colonel turned in, and went to sleep.

In the morning appeared Raghunath Dass, to report himself and surrender his arms. But the report was not accepted, for the Colonel told him what he had himself seen and heard.

Thunderstruck, the man insisted by some means on retiring from the service. Rama it was who had done this for His servant. Henceforth, in very truth, he would serve no other.

'He became a Vairagi,' said the Swami, 'on the banks of the Saraswati [Sarayu]. People thought him ignorant, but I knew his power. Daily he would feed thousands. Then would come the grain-seller, after a while, with his bill.

“H’m!” Raghunath Dass would say, “A thousand rupees you say? Let me see. It is a month I think since I have received anything. This will come, I fancy, tomorrow.” And it always came.’

Some one asked him [Raghunath Dass] if the story of the Ram-Ram party were true.

‘What is the use of knowing such things?’ he answered.

‘I do not ask for curiosity,’ urged the questioner, ‘but only to know if it is possible for such things to happen!’

‘Nothing is impossible with the Lord!’ answered Raghunath Dass.<sup>2</sup>

By narrating the inspiring story of Baba Raghunath Das, Swamiji has thus immortalized him. The few details of the saint’s life that are now available have been compiled in a Hindi booklet titled *Sri Raghunath Das*.<sup>3</sup> The accounts of certain events in the saint’s life in this booklet are somewhat different from Swamiji’s version of him, but it contains some additional information.

### **Early Life and Divine Dispensation**

Baba Raghunath Das was born in the month of Vaishakh (April-May) 1834 in the village of Paintepur, fifty kilometres north of Lucknow. His father’s name was Durga Prasad. Since childhood Raghunath Das was very compassionate; if he came across destitute or hungry persons, the boy would take them home and request his mother to feed them. As a young man he exercised regularly and became expert in wrestling. He also gained proficiency in wielding arms. He was married to a girl from a family belonging to what is now Sainikpuri, Lucknow.

One day Raghunath Das desired to undertake sadhana on the banks of the Ganga. He left without informing anyone and headed south towards the river. On his way he came across his friends, who asked him where he was going; he frankly told them everything. Being informed by the friends his family members pursued and

soon overtook him. The youth told them that he was just going for a holy dip in the Ganga, like anybody else. They agreed to let him proceed on the condition that his nephew Mathura Prasad would accompany him. He acquiesced and continued his journey with his nephew. It was evening when they reached Gurumba village and decided to halt for the night. After dinner they went to bed; his nephew was soon asleep, but Raghunath Das sat to meditate.

It is said that in the middle of the night, when he dozed off for a while, he had a dream in which Sri Hanuman appeared and said: ‘Raghunath, go to Lucknow where Robert Saheb is the Colonel in Wazid Ali’s army. Join his army; you will be very happy as the daily singing of the Ramayana is held there.’ He set out for Lucknow in the morning and after a little enquiry found Colonel Robert’s regiment. Most of the soldiers of the regiment were of a religious nature. A soldier took him to the Colonel, who interviewed and admitted him in the army. His nephew Mathura Prasad was sent home with a reliable soldier. After a few days Raghunath Das distinguished himself in a military parade and was promoted; his salary was also raised.

Once Raghunath Das, along with a few soldiers, took leave for two months during the months of January and February. They went to Prayag and visited several saints and sadhus. He felt drawn to a saint who had taken a vow of silence. The saint Mauni Baldev Dasji initiated him in the sacred Sri Rama mantra and named him Raghunath Das. At another time in the cantonment he heard that some monks had arrived in Lucknow. Raghunath Das went to benefit from their holy company. He became so engrossed in the spiritual discourses that he forgot all about his duty hours. Seeing Raghunath Das engrossed in holy company Sri Hanuman himself went and performed his duty in Raghunath’s form. When it



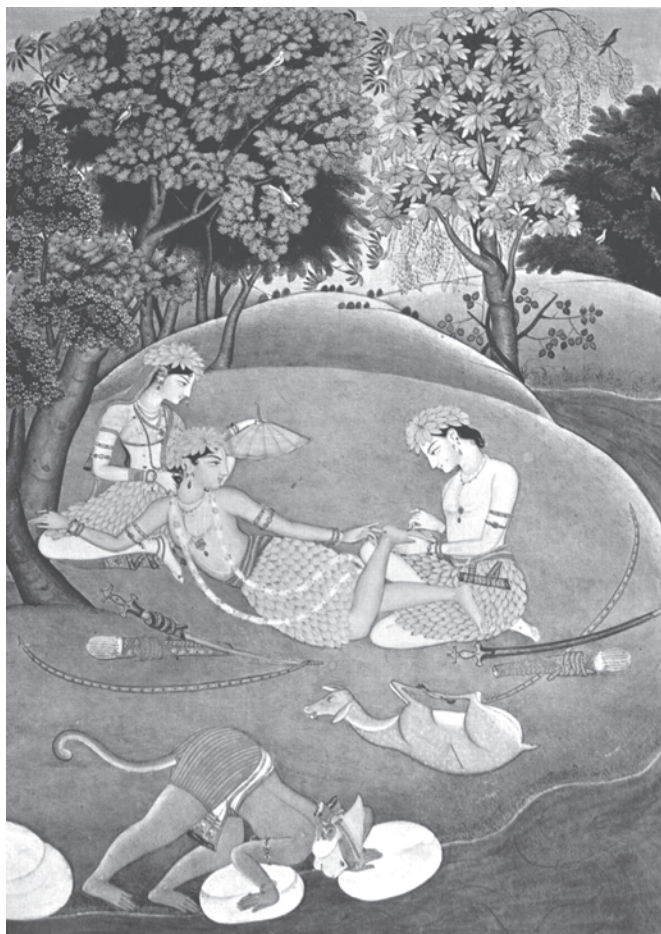
was morning Raghunath Das realized his mistake, and with a disturbed mind returned to the cantonment and told his friends everything. But they refused to believe him as one of the soldiers had sent him on duty, a second soldier had handed over the charge to him, and a third one had taken change from him in the morning. In order to ascertain the facts further they all proceeded to the monks. They were told that Raghunath Das was indeed with them for the whole night and left only in the morning. When a well-known sadhu of that place was told about this incident, he remarked: 'All this was done by Sri Rama. In the disguise of his devotee, Sri Rama had performed his devotee's duty. It was his lila.' Raghunath Das felt that as God himself had taken so much trouble for his sake, he should pay careful attention to his duty. As usual a large number of soldiers used to congregate daily and sing the *Ramcharitmanas*. Some of them repeatedly requested Raghunath Das to initiate them into the sacred mantra of Sri Rama. Seeing their intense desire and deep devotion he had to agree.

An English officer once tested the troops and being impressed with Raghunath's skills made him their head. Some complaints against the ruler of the Bhinga fort had begun reaching Lucknow. The authorities decided to attack the fort and take possession of it. The troops were equipped and after a march of seven days reached the fort. The king of Bhinga was waiting for them with his heavily equipped army and charged. Raghunath Das, as the head of the troops, suddenly remembered that it was the auspicious *Ramnavami*, the birthday of Sri Rama. He left the battlefield and sat in a secluded corner to meditate on Sri Rama. In the meantime the king's army attacked Raghunath's troops with redoubled

force. Seeing the precarious condition of his devotee Sri Rama himself entered the battlefield in Raghunath's form and single-handedly killed, by firing a cannon, hundreds of enemy soldiers and destroyed the ramparts of the fort; cutting through the panicked soldiers, he arrested the king. The king surrendered, handed over the wealth of his treasury, and submitted a letter accepting defeat. Thereafter, the disguised Sri Rama disappeared.

Deeply absorbed in meditation Raghunath Das was unaware of all that had happened on the battlefield. His meditation over, he was shocked to see the carnage on the battlefield. He felt worried thinking that this terrible battle was fought in his absence. Feeling ashamed he returned to the

'Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the Woods', c.1780



camp. As soon as the Colonel saw him, he started praising Raghunath Das profusely for saving the army with his bravery. Surprised he said: 'But I have not done anything praiseworthy. Rather, I am guilty of neglecting my duty. I have just got up from my meditation and have come straight here.' The Colonel replied: 'You are a real hero. I saw you fighting bravely. We have won the battle due to your bravery. You have no reason to feel guilty. I will recommend your case to the Nawab for further promotion.' The army marched back to Lucknow waving the flag of victory. Raghunath Das was, however, constantly thinking and feeling sad: 'For my sake Sri Rama himself had to take human form and undergo so much trouble. It would therefore be appropriate that I quit the army and devote myself fully to the service of Sri Rama.' As soon as they reached Lucknow he wrote his resignation and submitted it to the Colonel; but it was not accepted. The other officers also requested him to withdraw his resignation. The soft-hearted Raghunath Das was unable to reject the request of so many well-wishers. So he postponed his decision for some more time.

### **Breaking Away from the Army**

After some days Raghunath Das's troops were transferred to Meerut. His guru Mauni Baldev Dasji also happened to arrive there. This gave Raghunath Das an opportunity to be in his holy company for about a month. It resulted in his *vairagya*, dispassion, being intensified. When he learnt that his guru was embarking on a pilgrimage, Raghunath Das also became very eager to quit his job and devote himself fully to God. Several friends pressed him to desist, but this time he paid no heed. From Meerut he went straight to Haridwar and, after taking a dip in the Ganga, gave away all his possessions except the clothes he was wearing, a *kushasana*, seat, a rosary, and a copy of the Ramayana. Free and

contented he started towards Varanasi, walking by the side of the Ganga and being constantly engrossed in sadhana. With a few breaks on the way he reached Varanasi after about a year. There he stayed at Rajghat. Many people began flocking to him for spiritual instructions.

When his guru Mauni Baldev Das learnt that Raghunath Das was staying in Varanasi, he asked one of his disciples to fetch Raghunath Das to Ayodhya. Accompanied by the brother-disciple Raghunath Das came to Ayodhya and lived with his guru engaging himself in sadhana. Years passed when he suddenly remembered his family and, with due permission from his guru, left for his village, where he received the sad news of his father's demise. He met his relatives and villagers and narrated to them the glory of Sri Rama. One day his mother expressed a desire to go on a pilgrimage to Badrinath. Raghunath Das agreed and, along with his old mother, relatives, and some of the villagers started for Badrinath in the Himalayas. During the journey his mother fell seriously ill. She called Raghunath Das to her side and said: 'Son, you are a blessed person. Can you not fulfil my desire to attain Vaikuntha, the abode of Vishnu?' Hearing her request tears rolled down his cheeks, and with a heavy heart he assured his mother: 'Mother, your desire will be fulfilled and you will attain Vaikuntha!'

After his mother's demise, Raghunath Das decided to return to Ayodhya, and his wife wished to accompany him. Seeing her eagerness he took her along and asked her to serve his guru's consort while he engaged himself in serving his guru and doing sadhana. In course of time they had a son and a daughter, but the children did not survive long. His wife also passed away after a few years. Grief-stricken he put his whole heart and soul into the service and worship of Sri Rama. Many people

began arriving daily to listen to his discourses at Vasudeva Ghat. As the number of devotees increased the place became inadequate, so he decided to shift to the bank of River Sarayu and start an ashrama there. Here too his spirituality brought solace to thousands of devotees.

Raja Man Singh was the landlord of that area. Some jealous people went and informed him that Baba Raghunath Das had been gradually occupying more and more of his land. The Raja sent him a message: 'Take only that much land as you actually need. What will you do with so much land?' Raghunath Das replied: 'I need only a hut, the remaining land is being utilized by devotees for their accommodation and sadhanas. If you so desire we will happily leave the place.' Soon he left Vasudeva Ghat and settled in Madna village. Other monks and devotees followed him and stayed there chanting the sacred name of the Lord. After Baba Raghunath Das departed Raja Man Singh became sad and sent his men to Madna several time to bring him back; but all was in vain. At last the Raja himself went and persuaded him to return to Ayodhya. This time Raghunath Das chose to stay at Manjha, an island in the middle of the river Sarayu. After making necessary arrangements for his stay there the Raja returned to his palace. Many devotees began to flock to this ashrama by crossing the river by boat.

The Raja of Rewa, accompanied by a thousand attendants, once came to Manjha to meet Baba Raghunath Das. The Raja was so charmed by his spiritual knowledge and power that he offered him a sum of rupees twenty-one thousand and three thousand pieces of sweets. The sweets were distributed among the sadhus and brahmanas, and each was gifted a one rupee coin. The remaining amount was kept for feeding the poor. One day the deputy magistrate of Faizabad came to meet Baba Raghunath Das. While disembarking from the boat he slipped and fell in

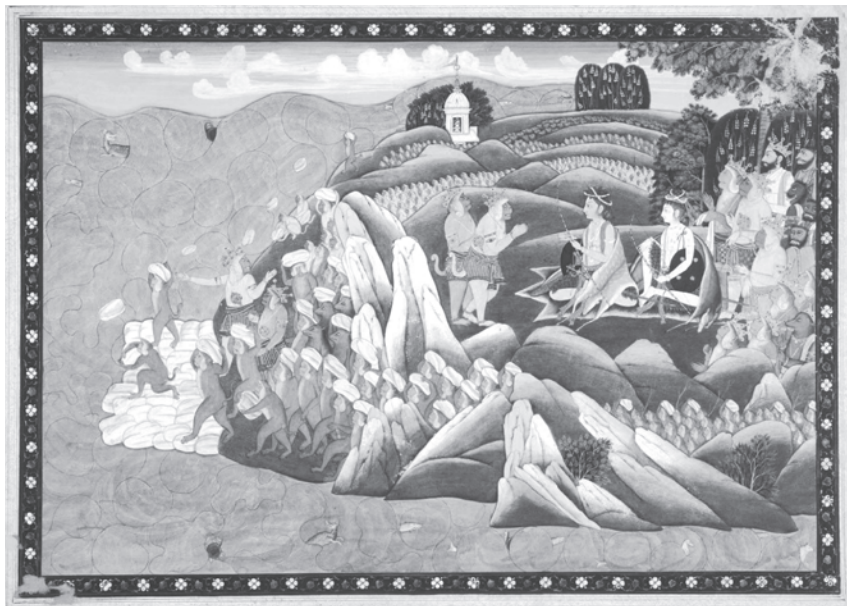
the muddy waters. He came to Babaji in wet clothes and told Baba Raghunath Das that it was very troublesome for his devotees to visit his ashrama on the island as they had to cross the river. He requested the Babaji to shift to the banks of the Sarayu again. After Babaji agreed all arrangements were made to shift the ashrama.

### ***Being Tested***

A monk named Kishundas decided to test Babaji. He used to assist Purandas, the ashrama manager. When Purandas decided to go on a pilgrimage to Badrinath, with Babaji's permission, he handed over the management to Kishundas. Once, when Baba Raghunath Das decided to feed the people of Ayodhya, Kishundas thought it to be a good opportunity to test Babaji. As the cooks were cooking and preparing sweets, Kishundas hid half the quantity of ghee. When the other half of the ghee was exhausted a person was sent to purchase ghee, but came back empty handed. No ghee was available anywhere. Finding no other way Babaji instructed his disciples: 'Go to River Sarayu with twenty pitchers. Tell her everything and request her for ghee on credit. Then fill twenty pitchers with the river water and come back.' They followed his instructions. The water had turned to ghee and it was poured into the cooking pans. One morning Raghunath Das, in order to repay the ghee debt, arranged to procure twenty pitchers of ghee and had them poured in the Sarayu. Kishundas was amazed. But he still doubted and resolved to test Babaji again.

In 1877 there was a terrible famine in Ayodhya. Hungry men, women, and children wailed in the streets. Many householders and monks of different denominations took shelter in Raghunath Das's ashrama and were being fed daily. One day a merchant named Ramdas from Faizabad came to see Babaji and falling at his feet prayed for his blessings. Babaji told him to





*The Rama Setu to Lanka being built by the monkeys and bears,  
Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, c.1850*

take money from the ashrama, with which he could purchase food grains and send them to the ashrama every day; by doing this people's suffering and his own poverty will end. Babaji advanced him thousands of rupees to start the grain-business. Ramdas now began to supply food grains to the ashrama regularly. Soon his business flourished and he became the richest grain merchant in Faizabad. Raghunath Das had instructed Kishundas to see that everyone was fed before midday and that none should remain hungry during the famine. He also asked Kishundas to check whether there was sufficient quantity of flour, pulses, rice, ghee, and so on in the store. If there was any shortage, he should be informed accordingly. Kishundas took it as another opportunity to test Babaji. He went to Faizabad and met Ramdas. He prejudiced Ramdas saying that Babaji would not be in a position to repay his debts in the future and so he should not supply any more grains on credit. Ramdas believed him and decided to act as he was told. As food in the store was almost exhausted he informed Babaji about it and also told him that

the merchant would be able to supply food grains only after the payment of his dues.

It occurred to Baba Raghunath Das that instead of depending on the donations of rich persons, he should totally depend on Sri Rama. Babaji became grave and engaged himself in prayers. Though it was past noon no food could be served to the hungry as the store was empty. In the evening a disciple brought a bowl of porridge for

Babaji, but he refused it as the guests were still hungry. Although Babaji had learnt through meditation what Kishundas had done, he kept silent. At midnight, when the hungry were asleep, Babaji had a vision of Goddess Lakshmi, who appeared, placed two bags near him, and vanished. He sent for Kishundas, who reported immediately. Babaji asked him to open the bags. They were filled with thousands of gold coins. Kishundas was now frightened. He realized that by trying to test Babaji he had committed a grave mistake. Falling at his feet he begged for forgiveness. Consoling him Babaji asked him to go to the merchant Ramdas, pay the debts, and make the necessary arrangements for feeding the hungry. Kishundas immediately left for Faizabad, and when Ramdas heard of this miracle, he trembled with fear and was overwhelmed with grief thinking that it was because of him that so many monks and devotees had to suffer the pangs of hunger for the whole day. After consoling him Kishundas returned to the ashrama, had food prepared, and fed the hungry people to their heart's content.

A wealthy old lady from South India once came to Ayodhya. After bathing in the Sarayu she wore old and tattered clothes and with a copper water-vessel went in search of a real saint. She went to various ashramas saying: 'I have only this copper vessel with me. I wish to feed the monks of Ayodhya with the money to be secured by selling it.' Hearing this people laughed and others drove her away thinking her to be mad. She reached the ashrama of Baba Raghunath Das and paying obeisance to Babaji showed her copper vessel and expressed her wish. Babaji asked someone to sell the copper vessel and purchase asafoetida. He instructed him to mix it with the curry and give it to everyone. There were warm acclamations in her name for the wonderful curry. Afterwards the old lady returned to her residence and came back to the ashrama in her expensive clothes and accompanied by her maid. She offered twenty thousand rupees to Babaji, who instructed his attendant to arrange for a feast for three more days. Happy and contented the old lady returned to South India.

### **Acquiring Additional Land**

As the number of monks, devotees, and spiritual aspirants went on increasing, the place in the ashrama became insufficient. Babaji thought that if Mother Sarayu would give some additional land by shifting herself a little further, it would solve the problem. After meditating on Sri Rama for a while, he asked for sugarcane juice and milk. He then went to the bank of the river and offered the same to Mother Sarayu with devotion while chanting her glory. At night the river started shifting towards the north, leaving the southern side dry. By the time it was morning she had vacated almost two miles of land. Amazed and overwhelmed with joy the people started singing the glory of Sri Rama with great enthusiasm.

The king of Gonda, Sri Krishna Dutta, accom-

panied by his wife, went to meet Babaji. After they had paid their obeisance Babaji blessed them and enquired about their well-being. The king noticed that the roofs of all the cottages were made of straw and leaves. So he proposed to construct a new temple, kitchen, store, and huts for the monks. Babaji accepted the proposal. At once the king arranged for thousands of rupees and placed the money at Babaji's disposal. A foundation laying ceremony was fixed on an auspicious day. Promising to be present the king returned to his palace. Later Babaji thought: 'It is due to my prayer that Mother Sarayu has given this land and it is also quite possible that in my absence she may take it back. In that case all the money donated by the king for the construction will be lost.' Consequently, he decided to utilize the money in a way as would make the king's name immortal. He called the manager and asked him to make the necessary arrangements for feeding saints, monks, and poor people. Cartloads of food were brought from the market. On receiving word from Babaji the king and the queen came to the ashrama along with the courtiers. The ashrama was crowded with sadhus and devotees. The food was ready. When the guests started eating Babaji told the king: 'You see, the stomach of a saint is blessed ground, his heart is heaven, and the food offered is the mortar that will strengthen the foundation of the temple and make it permanent. Such a temple will remain forever.' After the feast the king again requested Babaji with folded hands for the construction of the temple. But Babaji was not in favour of constructing a temple with only bricks and mortar. The king then liked the idea. He requested Babaji to arrange feasts for the sadhus for seven more days. With the permission of Babaji all the monks and saints of Ayodhya stayed there for seven days, chanting and singing the sacred name of Sri Rama. The royal couple returned to their palace after receiving Babaji's blessings.

It was the cold winter season. Babaji arranged for fireplaces and distributed hundreds of blankets among the sadhus. A group of monks arrived at Babaji's ashrama and decided to spend some days there. Baba Raghunath Das said to their leader, Haridas: 'Today I would like to serve you the food of your choice.' Haridas replied: 'If you so wish, I will be pleased to have watermelon with sugar, and it will be better if there is *malpua* [a kind of sweet] with it.' The people present wondered as to how it will be possible to get watermelon in that odd season! It was clear that Haridasji had deliberately asked for watermelon to test Babaji. But Babaji instructed someone to search for the said fruit and then sat to meditate on Sri Rama. After a few hours some boatmen came to the ashrama with watermelons. They said with the folded hands: 'Maharaj, we had sowed the seeds of watermelon in the month of Ashwin (September-October) and by the grace of God they are yielding fruits now. As they are out of season fruits we have brought them to be offered at your holy feet.' Babaji took it as the grace of Sri Rama and blessed them. Then, calling Haridasji and other monks, he said: 'The gracious Sri Rama has sent these watermelons, please eat them with sugar.' Haridas then confessed to Babaji: 'On our way to your ashrama, we heard that you always feed holy men with whatever food they wish to eat, so in order to verify it we had asked for the non-seasonal fruit. Please excuse us and permit us now to leave for Prayag.' Babaji gave them a large amount of money, clothes, and utensils before giving them a warm farewell. Saying '*Sant shiromani raghunath dasji ki jai*' [victory to Raghunath Dasji, the crest jewel among saints] they set out on their journey.

### **Towards the End of a Blessed Life**

One day Babaji met a monk with raised hands. After he paid obeisance, Babaji asked him why his hands were always raised. The monk replied:

'In this Kaliyuga unless one undergoes physical austerity, one cannot realize God. I am undergoing all this pain in order to please God.' Babaji said: 'But when God is pleased by love and devotion, what is the need to undergo such physical austerity?' The monk replied: 'It is true, but how to develop love and devotion?' Babaji replied: 'The power of love for God will bring your hands down to their normal position.' The monk said: 'Maharaj, ten years have passed. The flesh and blood have clotted around the shoulders and hence they cannot be brought down. However, you can bring them down by the power of your love for God; please do that and relieve me of this pain as early as possible.' Babaji shut his eyes and became absorbed in meditation on Sri Rama. After a little while he opened his eyes and singing the glory of the Lord said: 'O my child, you may bring down your hands now. Dive deep into the ocean of God's love.' The monk brought down his hands and to his and others' surprise they came to their normal position, well formed as before. Then, falling at Babaji's feet the monk expressed his gratefulness to him and humbly said: 'O Lord, blessed am I today! You have brought me out from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge.' After hearing Babaji's illuminating sermon on desire and its cessation, all his doubts were dispelled and he left.

Babaji left his body in the month of Paush (December-January) 1888. Since then every year on that day a large number of monks, spiritual seekers, and poor people are fed in remembrance of Baba Raghunath Das. Purandas had once asked him: 'Who lives in worldly bondage?' The saint had answered: 'Grief, attachment, sorrow, happiness, and the like are creations of maya. They are not real, they are like dreams. Maya has two forms: *vidya*, knowledge, and *avidya*, ignorance.

(Continued on page 488)

# The Five Great Sacrifices: Linking Ancient and Modern Hinduism

Swami Samarpanananda

WITH MASSIVE SOCIAL, economic, and political changes all over the world the daily religious devotions that were practised by the ancestors of the Hindus have become cumbersome in today's world. Moreover, the modern generation bereft of ancient traditions find itself at a loss in explaining what Hinduism, and religion in general, really is. There is unanimity, however, in the belief in God having many forms, reincarnation, karma, dharma, creation in cycles, and the infinity of time. Further, the belief in the Vedas as sacred and Om as the symbol of God, along with veneration of the guru, Gaya, Ganga, Gayatri, and *go*, cow, is prevalent. Beliefs apart, Hinduism has now boiled down to performing *samskaras*—sacraments—and *puja*, either at home or in a temple; occasionally attending *satsanga*, holy company; singing and listening to *bhajans*, devotional songs; watching digitalized mythological tales; observing fasts, ritual cleanliness, and some food habits; and a few other activities put forward by the many *sampradayas*, traditions, that were born and grew during the last century.

One of the trends in the ways Hinduism is followed at present is the wrong notion that rituals have become irrelevant in today's world. When Swami Vivekananda was in London, in 1895, two visitors came to see him, about whom he wrote to Mr E T Sturdy: 'Both of them want to know the rituals of my creed! This opened my eyes. The world in general must have some form. In fact, in the ordinary sense religion is philosophy concre-

tized through rituals and symbols. It is absolutely necessary to form some ritual and have a Church. That is to say, we must fix on some ritual as fast as we can. ... We will fix something grand, from birth to death of a man. A mere loose system of philosophy gets no hold on mankind.'<sup>1</sup> Later Swamiji spoke about having a new *Smriti*, religious code of conduct, framed for the present age.<sup>2</sup> Although Swamiji asked one of his disciples to produce a modern *Smriti*, the project never materialized. And if this is ever to happen, we have to first understand what links the various Hindu sects of the ancient, medieval, and modern periods; we have to first look at the core of Hinduism.

## The Essential Hinduism

Sri Ramakrishna taught: 'The Eternal Religion, the religion of the rishis, has been in existence from time out of mind and will exist eternally. There exists in this Sanatana Dharma all forms of worship—worship of God with form and worship of the Impersonal Deity as well. It contains all paths—the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, and so on. Other forms of religion, the modern cults, will remain for a few days and then disappear.'<sup>3</sup>

Defining the essential trait of a Hindu Swamiji said: 'If a Hindu is not spiritual I do not call him a Hindu.'<sup>4</sup> These two statements together imply that despite all the changes and reforms that keep taking place in Hinduism at regular intervals, true Hinduism is what leads one to direct spiritual growth and what continues as sacred trad-



itions from the time of the ancient sages. These traditions can be traced from the various types of sacred literature that form the basis of Sanatana Dharma. The edifice of every religion stands on four pillars: philosophy, mythology, rituals, and social conduct. In many religions these pillars are inextricably mixed, but in Hinduism each of these pillars has a distinct literature that characterize them. They are the Upanishads, the Itihasa-Puranas, the Tantras, and the Smritis. Although distinct, they have all sprung from the Vedas.

However, to understand the essentials of Hinduism one need not become a Vedic scholar; rather, one has only to be acquainted with its cardinal principles to be able to achieve moksha, liberation, which is the final goal placed before every Hindu. Stated simply the cardinal principles affirm that: (i) the philosophical conclusion of the Upanishads is that Brahman alone is Real; (ii) mythology has sprung around the concept of the various avatars; (iii) rituals have been codified with the idea of purifying and cleansing the individual who is identified with the world and worldliness; and (iv) codes of conduct have been developed with the specific purpose of uniting the individual with the universal.

The philosophy laid down in the Upanishads is sacrosanct and can never be changed, though it can be reiterated, as in the Bhagavadgita. Similarly, nothing new can be added to the mythological stories of the Puranas, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, though they are told and retold variously. It is the same with rituals associated with worship: though their principles are more or less fixed, they can undergo superficial changes whenever there is need of it. No Hindu has any ambiguity regarding these three. The problem lies with the actions connected to daily life, which are affected by social changes. Most of the time holding on to these practices is considered a sign of backwardness. However, Hindus

are flexible, and that is why they are saved from rigidly following certain rituals and social behaviour, which would have given rise to dangerous countercultures, and these to fanaticism. Yet, in today's modern world, when one's religious affiliations can hardly be distinguished, it is daily external practices that determines one's identity.

Hinduism mentions five types of karmas, which are understood in this context as activities. They are: *nitya*, daily rituals, *naimittika*, performed on special occasions, *prayaschitta*, penances, *kamya*, related to worldly desires, and *nishiddha*, prohibited. The Upanishads do not discuss these issues since, according to them, karma constitutes only the preparatory ground for realizing the Real—one who wants to be identified with the ultimate Reality has to renounce all types of karma. The remaining three pillars—the Itihasa-Puranas, the Tantras, and the Smritis—detail the dos and don'ts, sometime through assertions and at other times through examples.

Interestingly, values in Hinduism are not static, as many wrongly believe. Even the highest values like truthfulness and non-violence sometimes come to loggerheads, as in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—because of their inherent contradictions. However, throughout the entire Hindu auxiliary religious literature there are two features, which are more attitudes than values, that remain constant; they are unselfishness and detachment. Sri Rama and Sri Krishna were completely detached; that is why the results of their good or bad karma did not affect them. Sri Rama killing Vali, and Sri Krishna's role in the great Kurukshetra War belongs to this category of detachment.

To instil these principles of unselfishness and detachment in the daily life of common people, the sages prescribed the performance of the *pancha-mahayajna*, five great sacrifices. Through the daily performance of these five great sacrifices

a householder can easily break the clutches of selfishness. These *nitya* five great sacrifices can be performed in different ways to also make them *naimittika*, by performing them on a large scale on special days such as a puja, where the whole neighbourhood or community is involved; *prayaschitta*, by performing one of them as atonement for some past mistakes, such as feeding the hungry or going on a pilgrimage; *karma*, by praying for the welfare of one's family and friends; *nishiddha*, by not harming humans or the environment.

### **The Five Great Yajnas**

Broadly speaking, any religious act of an individual or of a group is a yajna. The word is derived from the root *yaj*, to worship, to sacrifice, to bestow. It is offering a specified material in the form of an oblation to a specific god. Yajnas are invariably associated with the Vedas, and

were given at the commencement of creation by the Godhead to both the gods and the human beings, as a way to keep them connected. Human beings were to propitiate the gods, and in return the gods bestowed anything the humans needed. Normally, karma is considered to be something mundane, but when that very karma is performed with a religious outlook it becomes a yajna. Even the simplest act of breathing can be transformed into a sacrifice when it is performed with a proper attitude.<sup>5</sup> Thus, yajna is the consecration of the mundane to the sacred. It is a bridge between the material and the spiritual and is the instrument to convert the insignificant into the exalted. To be spiritual one's karma has to become spiritualized, and that requires every act to become a yajna. Even the creation by the Supreme Purusha was described as a yajna by the Vedic sages.<sup>6</sup>



However, it is difficult for a common person to concentrate on every act as a yajna. Therefore, an easier way had to be found for the journey towards spirituality. It was to solve this problem that the Vedic sages framed methods by which the life of an individual and of society at large could be regulated. For every stage and state of life—birth, death, marriage, acquisition, renunciation, sorrow, joy, victory, loss, and so on—there arose a yajna. Slowly these yajnas crystallized into sacraments. The other yajnas that were not sacraments were characterized by offering oblations to various deities. The *havih*, oblations, meant for gods were poured into the *homa*, fire, whereas the offerings made to the ancestors and demigods—known as *bali*—were placed on strewn grass or offered in the waters. The *pancha-mahayajna* followed by Hindus since time immemorial is a unique combination of Vedic sacrifices, the concept of sacrifices as presented in the fourth chapter of the Gita, and the ritualistic worship that replaced the daily Vedic sacrifices.

The first clear mention of the term *pancha-mahayajna* is found in the Mahabharata. Here, in the famous debate between the sage Ashtavakra and Vandi—the court priest of King Janaka—the number five is extolled because of the great sacrifices being five in number.<sup>7</sup> In the same book Yuddhisthira replies to the Yaksha that a person who enjoys all sensory objects is endowed with intelligence and is regarded by the world as well as liked by all beings, but though alive that person is dead because of not performing the five great sacrifices (1.607). Law books like the *Manu Smriti* are emphatic about the obligation of every householder to perform these yajnas daily.<sup>8</sup> In his commentary on the Gita, Acharya Shankara mentions the *pancha-mahayajna* while commenting on the importance of yajna in human life.<sup>9</sup>

Coming to our own times Swami Vivekananda, while pointing out the methods and means of bhakti yoga, says: ‘As to sacrificial work, it is understood that the five great sacrifices (*Pancha-mahayajna*) have to be performed as usual.’<sup>10</sup> Swamiji takes for granted that every Hindu has to perform these rituals. Indeed, it has been the custom to rigorously practise these five yajnas.

We can conclude that the *pancha-mahayajna* is one ritual that has been recommended from ancient times till now. This is the distinctive ritual that links ancient and modern times, a ritual that unfortunately seems to have been forgotten by present generations. It must be mentioned here that although different Hindu sects practise different rituals, they are all unanimous with regard to the importance of the practice of the *pancha-mahayajna* beyond differences in locality, caste, gender, and sect.

Hindus, irrespective of where they live, are indebted to five sets of entities: the sages, who have given them their culture; the gods, who sustain the cosmic forces; the ancestors, from whom has come the genetic material; society, which nurtures them in dharma; and the lower forms of life, which make living possible. Therefore, a sensitive Hindu will invariably feel happy to express his or her gratefulness to all of them. It is with this grand background that the concept of the *pancha-mahayajna* was developed. And it is only through the practise of these five great yajnas that one can feel connected with the seen and unseen universe, with the past and the present. The *pancha-mahayajna* comprises:

- Brahma Yajna, also known as Rishi Yajna, which is dedicated to the sages. The rituals consist of daily japa, meditation, and *svadhyaya*, study of sacred scriptures. The individual has the freedom to select a Chosen Ideal for meditation and prayers as well as scriptures for daily recital and study.

- Deva Yajna, which is dedicated to the gods and performed through ritualistic worship at home or in a temple. Most Hindu families have a *griha devata*, household deity, or a *kula devata*, ancestral deity, to whom worship is offered daily. Hindus may offer ritualistic worship to the supreme Godhead or to any of the innumerable deities of the Hindu pantheon through offering flowers, incense, and so on.

- Pitri Yajna, which is meant for the ancestors. A small amount of food and water is offered in their names, at noon, by placing it outside the plate. Later this offering is taken and left out for birds or stray animals.

- Nri Yajna, also known as Manushya Yajna, which is done for the welfare of the whole humanity and is performed by feeding guests, beggars, or holy men. In the Mahabharata Yudhisthira is told that even if a householder has no food to offer to people, one can always offer water, a seat, or at least kind words.

- Bhuta Yajna, which is the offering to lower beings. It is performed by daily feeding of birds, animals, and insects.

Indians have been practising these five great sacrifices since ancient times, and nearly every Hindu home follows them knowingly or unknowingly. It is only the modern generation that is losing the link with the past and with the universe around, for which it has already started paying a heavy price. In today's fast paced life it may not be possible for everyone to follow these five yajnas fully, but if one is conscious of one's sacred duties, one can always find ways to perform them. For example, one can keep aside some money every day for Nri Yajna and Bhuta Yajna separately, which can be donated to institutions that serve the poor and others working for nature or wildlife conservation.

Here it must be added that these rituals are not meant for sannyasins. Sannyasins focus only

on the first two of these practices, and many monastic organizations now serve humanity and extend relief to animals as well. Everyone else has to follow these rituals, since they help to purify the mind and connect one with the cosmos.

### **The Microcosm and the Macrocosm**

One of the earliest prayers in the Rig Veda states: 'Bounteous (deities), we forthwith proclaim aloud that brotherhood of yours in the mother's womb, (first) in common union, then as born in diverse manner.'<sup>11</sup> This prayer to the gods by the sage indicates that to be born is to become one with entire nature. Swami Vivekananda had a cosmic revelation while travelling in Almora; he discovered that 'the microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the universal soul in the Living Prakriti [Nature]'.<sup>12</sup> Later he used to emphasize this essential unity of existence in his lectures. A common person feels bound, as in a prison, and cannot even link one's petty existence with the surrounding unity; what to speak of feeling oneness! These five sacrifices connect an individual with the cosmos; that is why they are called great and are mandatory for all householders.

There is at present a big hue and cry about human carbon footprint and environmental degradation. This is the natural outcome of persons who have exploited nature for selfish needs and now find the whole exercise to be a big mistake. They are shouting to reduce carbon emissions and stop exploiting nature. Against this situation the *pancha-mahayajna* of Hinduism has become still more relevant, not only for Hindus but for anyone who is in tune with nature.


These sacrifices not only protect the environment but also show why we must practise non-violence. Destruction and wastage of any kind is strictly prohibited in Hinduism. When we know that every morsel of food that we eat is at



the expense of others' life, we would then learn to be humble. This also makes us repay our debts to all those who make our life possible.

With the constant encouragement of a self-centred lifestyle, humanity is suffering from sleep disorders, depression, and self-destructive moods. To overcome these maladies the wise ones recommend practising unselfishness and service to others. What can be a better way to do this than performing the five great sacrifices?

Swami Vivekananda wanted us to synthesize the four yogas, and this synthesis can be done by the daily practice of these yajnas. In this age the synthesis of the yogas is the benchmark for the correctness of any religious practice. The Brahma Yajna or the Rishi Yajna are based on jnana yoga and raja yoga; Deva Yajna is all about bhakti yoga; and the remaining three yajnas are related to karma yoga.

There is no way to set the clock back and take society to the days of Vedic yajnas, nor is it advisable either. What can be really done is to gently guide the uninformed towards a higher way of life. As mentioned earlier, there is no confusion among Hindus regarding the sacredness of the Vedas or the profound philosophy found in the Upanishads and the Gita. The only missing link of present-day Hindus with their past is the absence of a conscious identification with the cosmos, which can be easily overcome by performing the *pancha-mahayajna*. 


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(Continued from page 482)

The jivatman, individual soul, is part and parcel of the Paramatman, Supreme Soul, and it is immortal. The jiva experiences bondage and liberation. The human body has within it both the jiva and the Paramatman. It is as if two birds were sitting on a tree, and while one of them eats the fruits of the tree, the other remains as a *sakshi*, witness. The jiva experiences joy and sorrow according to the law of karma, but the Paramatman, who resides as the witness, is free from all this. It is the jiva that is caught in the snare of *avidya* and is in bondage.

About the death of a *paramahansa*, which he was, he used to teach: 'A saint may give up his body at any place, in a lowly house or on the road. If he so wishes, he may leave his body in a moment or after being bedridden for a long time. If he wishes, he may die in a foreign land or on the banks of the Ganga. Raghunath Das says that those on whose forehead Sri Rama has himself made a mark, liberation itself will run after them.' 

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# Natha Pantha: Order of the Primordial Shiva

Dr Satish K Kapoor

WHILE PASHUPATA SHAIVAS, Lakulishas, Kapalikas, and Kalamukhas were progressively losing contact with people during the first half of the second millennium, Natha Pantha—presumably originated in north and north-east Bengal—spread across India.

Natha Pantha is also known as Adinatha Sampradaya, 'Order of the Primordial Shiva', Yogi Pantha, 'Order of Yogis'—Kanaphata (split-eared) yogis or Siddha (realized) yogis—Goraksha Pantha, 'Sect of Goraksha (or Gorakha)', or Siddha Siddhanta Padyati, 'Methods and Principles of Realized Ones'.

Natha Pantha remained popular throughout the previous millennium and was influenced, to some extent, by the austere tantra doctrines of the Shaiva, Shakta, Sahajiya, Siddha Baul, and Bauddha traditions.<sup>1</sup> Yet Nathas—*natha* means lord, master, or protector—distinguished themselves by their unitive metaphysics; high standard of morality; prohibition of *madya* and *māmsa*, liquor and animal food; mastery over asanas, yogic postures, and *prāṇa*, vital breath; extraordinary control over mind and body; herbal or alchemical knowledge; magical or mystical feats; powers of benefaction; and the ability to communicate with plants and animals as well as to predict future events. In course of time magicians, sorcerers, snake-charmers, wandering ascetics with wonder-drugs, and many more who worshipped Shiva or practised yoga came to its fold. But all of them did not wear

big earrings—*mudrā* or *kārṇa-kundala*—or aim at spiritual realization. The Nathas did not posit God outside the creation and believed that each human is perfect, though only a few could realize this fact.

For Natha Panthis the supreme master of all is Shiva—also called Adinatha, from whom everything ensues, than whom nothing is greater, and without whom none can experience bliss. The Nathas were different from Kapalikas, Mattamayuras, and Aghoris as they did not indulge in gory practices like *śava-sādhana*, spiritual practice on a corpse—mentioned in the *Kaulavali Nirṇaya* (14.75–260), the *Kula-chudamani* (6.19–28), and other tantric texts—or observe the *pañcamakāra*, practice of the five 'M's, as opposed to *vedācāra*, Vedic rules of conduct. They disapproved of such obnoxious rites as *mārana*, killing, *uccāṭana*, disturbing others, *haraṇa*, carrying away, and *stambhana*, preventing others from doing something, commonly observed by left-handed sects. The Nathas affirmed that the human body is a miniature universe that must not be neglected or polluted by wicked thoughts or immoral actions. Hence, they advocated the strengthening of the body, like the thunderbolt of Indra, through the practice of *kāya-sādhana*,<sup>2</sup> involving control over breath, the senses, and the mind as well as the use of alchemical preparations, specially those related to mercury and sulphur—symbolically associated with Shiva and Shakti—as also herbal drugs like bilva (*Aegle marmelos*), haritaki (*Terminalia*

*chebula*), vibhitaka (*Terminalia belerica*), amla, (*Embllica officinalis*), mundi (*Sphaeranthus indicus*), amritavalli (*Tinospora cordifolia*), palasha (*Buteamonosperma*), and many more. The Nathas presented an integrated system of physical, mental, moral, and spiritual culture that can help one to savour the divine elixir stored in the *brahmarandhra*, aperture in the crown of the head.

### **Matsyendranatha: The First Human Guru**

The historical founder of Natha Pantha was Matsyendranatha—in common parlance, Macchendra—(tenth century CE), mythically believed to have been born out of the womb of a *matsya*, fish. He has been identified with the mystic Luyi-pada—Lui-pa meaning fish—of Tibet and Avalokiteshvara Padmapani of the Buddhist tradition. The *Kaula-jnana-nirnaya*, ‘Judgement of Kaula-knowledge’, an outstanding Buddhist tantra of Bengal, and the *Akula-viratantra*, a Shakta text delving on the Shiva aspect of Shakti for lower grade tantric aspirants, have been attributed to him.<sup>3</sup>

*Haṭha-vidyā*, the knowledge of hatha yoga, leading the aspirant to ‘the highest raja yoga’ is ascribed to Adinatha (Shiva) in the *Haṭha Yoga Pradipika* (1.2) by Yogi Swatmarama (fifteenth-sixteenth century), disciple of Shrinatha. Matsyendranatha, the first human guru, evolved techniques for bringing the body under conscious control by asanas; *mudrās*, seals; *bandhas*, body locks; *prāṇāyāma*, breathing techniques to control *prāṇa*, vital power; and *bhūta-śuddhi*, purification of the five elements constituting the gross body.

As Matsyendranatha experimented with such difficult practices as the *khecarī mudra*—*khe* is *ākāśa*, sky, and *carī* means to move—in which the tendon of the tongue is cut little by little, for about six months, and lengthened till

it reaches up to the forehead<sup>4</sup> and then turned upwards and backwards with focused vision to partake of the divine nectar; the *vajrolī mudrā*, in which one draws back the seminal fluid or sucks liquids—even mercury—through the urethra;<sup>5</sup> or the *plāvinī kumbhaka*, in which breath is so retained as to enable one to walk on water or live exclusively on air.<sup>6</sup> His doctrine became popular as forced, *haṭha*, yoga. Asanas like *matsyendrāsana*, ‘fish-pose’; *ardha*, ‘half-pose’, *matsyendrāsana*; and *matsyāsana*, useful in curing a number of diseases like constipation, rheumatism, and diabetes are known after him.

In strictly orthodox terms hatha yoga is the method of uniting the two life-sustaining currents—the sun-breath (*ha*) flowing through the *pingalā*, right nostril, and the moon-breath (*tha*) flowing through the *iḍā*, left nostril—with the ultimate aim of making both of them flow through the *suṣumnā*, principal conduit, between *iḍā* and *pingalā*, for the awakening of *kundalīni śakti*, serpent power, lying in a dormant state at the base of the spine. The kundalīni has three and a half coils like a serpent, representing the qualities of *sattva*, purity, *rajas*, passion, and *taṃas*, inertia; the half coil symbolises the modifications of Prakṛiti.<sup>7</sup>

Matsyendranatha earned wide popularity in Nepal, North India, Bengal and Assam, and parts of South India too; he prepared the ground for the proliferation of his sect by grooming a number of disciples, the most notable among them being Gorakhanatha. Reverentially called Karunamaya, ‘full of compassion’, Matsyendranatha is regarded as the patron deity of the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal. Two famous shrines dedicated to him in the capital city of Kathmandu are those of Rato (red) Machindranatha and Seto (white) Machindranatha. The chariot-pulling festival of Seto Machindranatha from Bungamati to Patan

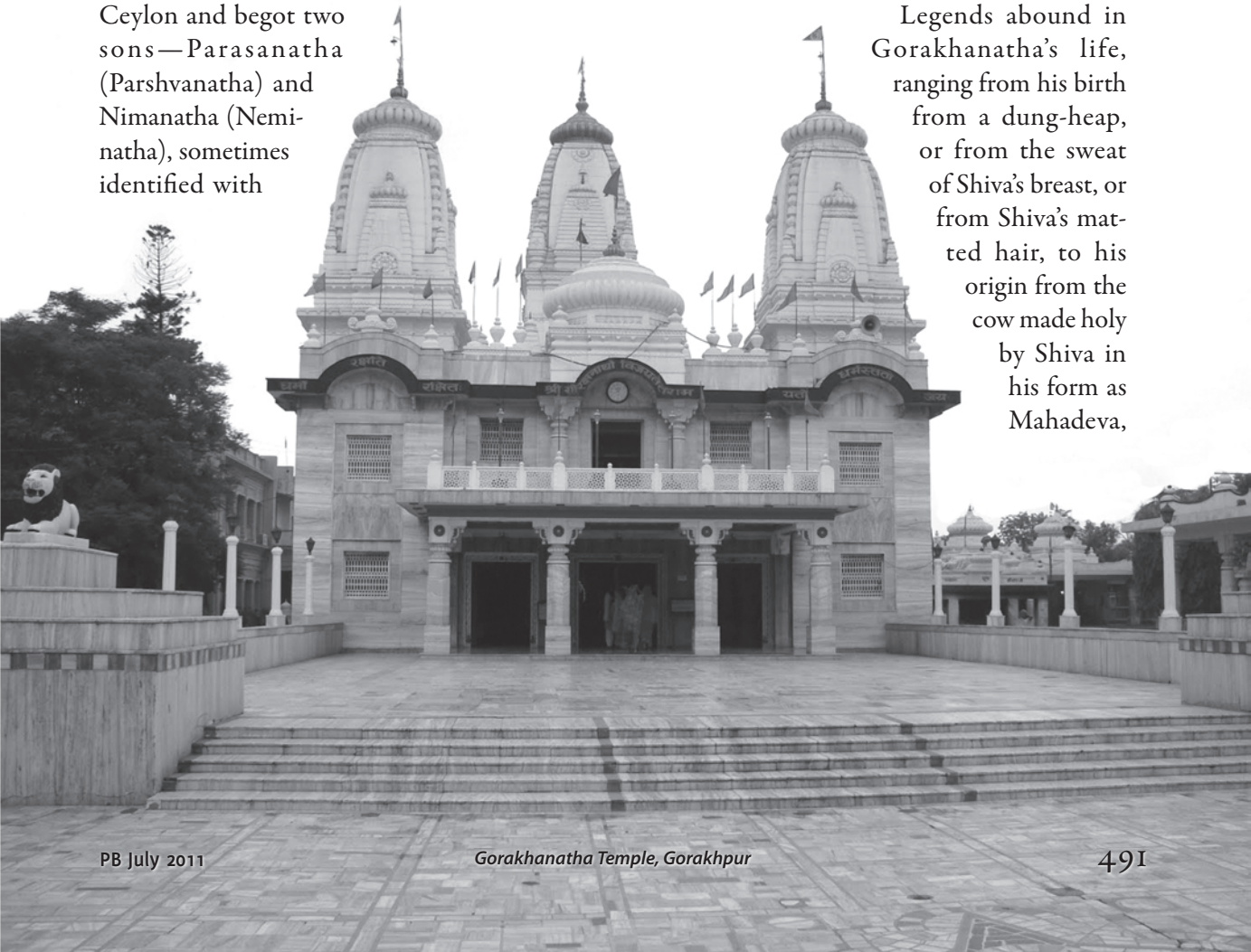
takes place every twelve years, like the Mahakumbha, the biggest religious fair of Hindus in India.

### **Gorakhanatha: Preceptor of His Preceptor**

Gorakhanatha—Gorakha or Gorakshanatha, ‘Lord who protects cows’—outshone his preceptor in spiritual and esoteric practices that help one gain such mystical powers as invisibility, lightness, immunity from weapons, magnification, metabolic and psychic control over oneself, and the ability to separate the astral from the physical body and move about in the sky. According to tradition, Gorakhanatha saved his guru from further moral depravity when the latter became enamoured of the queen of Ceylon and begot two sons—Parasanatha (Parshvanatha) and Nimanatha (Neminatha), sometimes identified with

the Tirthankaras of Jainism.<sup>8</sup> That precisely explains why Gorakhanatha is regarded as the preceptor of his preceptor in the folk tradition of Bengal. Gorakhanatha popularized hatha yoga in a rechristened form, adhering to the original doctrine of the sage Patanjali (c.200 BCE), which emphasises the discipline of the body and the mind through observance of *yama* and *niyama*, ethical precepts; *āsana*, right posture; *prāṇāyāma*, breath regulation; *pratyāhāra*, withdrawal from sensory objects; *dhāraṇā*, concentration; and *dhyānā*, meditation, to achieve *samādhi*, union (yoga) with the Divine Being. Ironically, *Goraksha-shataka*, ‘Hundred verses of Gorakha’, excludes *yama* and *niyama*, the first two aspects of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra*, although these are religiously observed by the Nathas.

Legends abound in Gorakhanatha’s life, ranging from his birth from a dung-heap, or from the sweat of Shiva’s breast, or from Shiva’s matted hair, to his origin from the cow made holy by Shiva in his form as Mahadeva,





‘Great God’. His date of birth has been placed by Briggs around the thirteenth century—which seems to be incorrect since had it been so he could not have met Allama Prabhu, the Virashaiva mystic and poet belonging to the twelfth century.<sup>9</sup> As per the North Indian tradition, he was born somewhere in Punjab in the eleventh or twelfth century, but his name became a household word due to his parapsychological faculties.

Gorakhanatha observed extreme physical and mental austerities to conserve his *prāṇa śakti*, vital power, and became a *mahāsiddha*, accomplished yogi. The tradition of making an incision in the cartilage of the ear for wearing large rings, as part of the initiatory rites of the Nathas, started with him. The ear-piercing ritual derives its origin from the Vedic *karnābedha saṁskāra*, rite performed during childhood to make children immune from malefic influence or diseases like hernia and enlargement of testis, a fact substantiated by the *Sushruta Samhita* (19.21). The Nathas believe that split ears render them more receptive to ‘the etheric nuances of unstruck sound’—*anāhata nāda*—that no one else can listen to.<sup>10</sup>

The popular hatha yoga, raja yoga, laya yoga, kundalini yoga, dhyana yoga, mantra yoga, or nada yoga preached today by Hindu religious sects in various forms owe a lot to Gorakhanatha’s injunctions as recorded by Yogi Swatmarama.<sup>11</sup> Gorakhanatha prescribed *anāhata-nāda*, the practice of listening to the eternal sound vibrating in each person, for those spiritual aspirants who could not follow the path of knowledge, known as jnana yoga. Sitting without encumbrances in *muktāsana*—also called *gorakṣāsana*—and with open eyes, as in *śāmbhavī-mudrā*, one could hear the sound of cosmic vibration through one’s right ear (4.64–6). One could further contemplate on

the space between the eyebrows, in the *ājñā cakra*, for achieving the blissful *unmani* state. *Laya*, vibration, produced by *nāda*, at once gives an experience of spiritual powers (4.79). *Laya* makes one forgetful of the objects of the senses. The mind is the master of the senses, and the breath is the master of the mind. The breath, in its turn, is subordinate to *laya*, absorption, and that *laya* depends on the *nāda* (4.29, 33). ‘Just as a bee, drinking sweet juice, does not care for the smell of the flower; so the mind, absorbed in *nāda*, does not desire the objects of enjoyment’ (4.89). Gorakhanatha thus used the principle of sound to stabilize the mind and tune it with the cosmic Being.

Gorakhanatha travelled widely in India and abroad, from Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh to Bengal and Assam, from Maharashtra and Karnataka to the southernmost parts, reaching as far as Ceylon. Peshawar, now in Pakistan, was the hub of his activities and from where he went to South and South Central Asia.<sup>12</sup> He sojourned in Nepal, Sindh, Afghanistan, Baluchistan, and Iran delineating how one can attain immortality by purity of thought, self-control, detachment from worldly affairs, and the practice of yoga under the guidance of a guru.

As the physical body is the prime vehicle for the discharge of human activities, he advised spiritual aspirants to take pure, fresh, and nutritious food of the sattvic type, strictly avoiding intoxicating liquors, fish, meat, garlic, onions, minor grains, or such substances as are too bitter, sour, saltish, hot, or that cause a burning sensation. To check the distractions of the mind he exhorted travellers on the yogic path to shun the company of women and the evil-minded. Charting a practical approach to the realization of the transcendental Shiva and to achieve liberation while living, he suggested

constant and vigilant practice, keeping aside laziness and the pedagogy of yogic discipline.<sup>13</sup> To quote him: 'Success cannot be attained by adopting a particular dress. It cannot be gained by telling tales. Practice alone is the means to success. This is true, there is no doubt' (1.68).

For awakening Parameshvari, 'the Great Goddess'—also called Bhujangi, 'a she-serpent', Shakti, 'power', Ishvari, 'of the nature of God', Kundali, 'of a bent shape', or Arundhati, a Vedic goddess—he suggested yogis to observe brahmacharya, continence, and always eat sparingly while following the procedure of *śakti-cālana*, flow of energy (3.97–123).<sup>14</sup>

Several sites, temples, *tapasthalis*—places for ascetic practices—hermitages, monasteries, and hillocks commemorate Gorakhanatha's name. For example, Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh; Gorakhamari, or Gorakhamandi, in Kathiawar, Gujarat; Gorakha temple at Dhinodhar hill, near Bhuj, Gujarat; Gorakhadanda near Mangalore, Karnataka; Gorakha-tilla, also called Tilla Jogian, a hillock in west Punjab, Pakistan; Gorakha Dibbi in the precincts of Jwalaji shrine, Himachal Pradesh; Gorakhatari in Peshawar, Pakistan; and many centres of worship in Nepal, among which are Bogamati, Mrigasthali, Sawari Kot, Pidadhan, Bhat Gaon, and Caughara. The valiant Gurkha community of Nepal proudly derive their spiritual lineage from Guru Gorakhanatha. Of the five main peaks of mount Girnar, the highest (3,666 ft) is named after Gorakhanatha. The other four peaks—Ambaji, Oghad, Dattatreya (Datta), and Kalika—are associated with Shaiva or Shiva-Shakti schools. Some Natha teachers are said to have been endowed with divine powers by Dattatreya—called the Adi Guru, primal spiritual guide—or by mother goddesses, who are the matrix of the universe. It is believed that the preceptors of the Natha sect reveal their cos-

mic presence in Girnar during Lili Parikrama, the five-day annual circumambulatory fair held from the 11th to the 15th of the bright half of Kartika (October–November).<sup>15</sup>

Among the major works attributed to Gorakhanatha are *Siddha-siddhāntapadyati*, 'Method and Principles of Adepts', and *Goraksha-shataka*, 'Hundred Verses of Gorakha'. Several other texts known after him in Sanskrit, Hindi, and Punjabi are: *Gorakha-gita*, 'Gospel of Gorakha', *Goraksha Samhita*, 'Collection of Gorakha', *Jnanamrita*, 'Nectar of Knowledge', *Yoga-martanda*, 'Sun of Yoga', *Yoga-bija*, 'Seed of Yoga', *Gorakhabani*, 'The Word of Gorakha', and *Gorakha-bodha*, 'Realization of Gorakha'. *Gorakṣāsana*, the yogic posture which is a panacea for all diseases,<sup>16</sup> is named after him. So are medicinal herbs like gorakha-mundi (*Sphaeranthus indicus*) and gorakha-pana (*Heliotropium strigosum*), which he discovered for healing wounds, eye disorders, and piles; or the gorakha-cinca tree (*Baobab*, *Amli*, *Imali*, *Tamarindus indica*), under whose shade he used to meditate and teach.

(To be concluded)

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(Continued on page 501)

# *Mexico Rising: The Gods Are Alive*

**Elizabeth Usha Harding**

**F**OR MANY YEARS I have wanted to write an article on Our Lady of Guadalupe and Mexico City, but always pushed the project aside for one reason or another. I had been busy writing about Hindu gods and pilgrimages to India. During journeys that took me all over India, I realized that ancient India and ancient Mexico have a lot in common.

Both countries were home to sophisticated civilizations that used precise measurements for time and for physical space. They lived close to nature and made ritual offerings to propitiate and please their gods. The ancients in India and Mexico were superb mathematicians and astronomers who built temples according to sacred dimensions that, in some instances, are identical. Their giant temples and monuments still stand today bearing witness to a glorious past.

Both countries were conquered by invaders who plundered their natural resources and, as a result, both countries today are referred to as developing countries. There is a painful difference, though. In India past traditions evolved with time yet remained current, and ancient Hindu gods are still being worshipped in an unbroken succession. The plant never lost its roots. Every time India was conquered by a new ruler Hindus somehow managed to assimilate the god of their conqueror into their existing pantheon. In Mexico, on the other hand, ancient traditions largely stayed in the past and, today, the gods of their forefathers are relegated to museums.

## ***First Impressions***

On my first trip to Mexico City I woke up early

in the morning to a voice talking in my head. Though this is rather unusual, it did not seem so at the time. The voice spoke English like a newscaster and, lying on my queen-size bed under crisp white sheets, I listened to a running commentary on historic and modern times in Mexico gone wrong. I could have switched off this voice, telling myself not to give in to crazy notions like listening to a voice in my head, but I did not, because the things the voice said made sense.

I had come to Mexico City primarily to visit Our Lady of Guadalupe and intended to go to the basilica straight away. Perhaps the voice in my head was fate deciding otherwise. Circumstances first brought me to the National Museum of Anthropology that houses treasures recovered from the Olmec, Aztec, and Mayan civilizations. Some of Mexico's most powerful gods live there and, sadly, they are referred to as historic.

The first god I encountered was Tlaloc, the Aztec god of water and of rain, who stands as a gigantic statue over a fountain near the museum entrance. I had heard a story that, true to his name, Tlaloc produced an unseasonably heavy rainstorm that hit Mexico City when his statue was excavated and brought to its current location.

Looking up at the massive statue, I rubbed my head to get rid of a throbbing headache, probably due to being unaccustomed to the city's high altitude. Some birds nearby happily dipped their heads into the fountain's green water and splashed around as if to invite me to do likewise. Just then I remembered a Christian priest in the US telling me that Tlaloc is another form of the Indian god Indra and that his waters have



healing powers. I splashed some fountain water on my head and neck and immediately felt refreshed. My headache left me after some time.

I had been under the impression that all of Mexico was poor and backward. Though poverty exists, Mexico City certainly is not backward. I saw a beautiful city with lush trees lining wide avenues and dignified people walking along sidewalks past chic stores and cafes.

The National Museum of Anthropology is one of the finest museums I have seen—better than the museums in Vienna, a city famous for preserving art and historic treasures. Upon entering one walks out onto a patio that is surrounded by exhibition halls featuring Olmec, Aztec, and Mayan artifacts. I passed an interesting fountain shaped like a huge umbrella from which water was dripping and cascading to the ground.

Outside the spacious hall with the Aztec exhibit is a model of Teotihuacan, an ancient city that contains some of the largest pyramids built in the pre-Columbian Americas. The inhabitants must have kept God in the centre of their lives and activities to build their city around pyramids and temples.

As I walked over the beautifully inlaid marble floor of the Aztec exhibit hall, I wondered what visitors would do if all these gods and goddesses would come alive. I passed a tour group huddled before the perhaps most famous artefact in the museum—the round Aztec Sun Stone, a calendar consisting of a 365-day solar agricultural calendar cycle and a 260-day sacred ritual cycle. Today people wear this beautiful Aztec calendar on their T-shirts, though they hardly know its significance.

### ***Coatlicue, Mother of Gods***

Looking past historic artefacts, a giant monolithic statue on the other side of the hall caught my eye. I stood in awe when I reached the colossal figure of Coatlicue, the mother of Aztec

gods and celestial bodies. She is a powerful representation of Mother Earth, who gives life and, when the time comes, takes it back into herself. She is decorated with skulls and wears a garland of human hearts and a skirt of squirming serpents. In the native Nahuatl language ‘Coatlicue’ means ‘the one with the skirt of serpents’.

Coatlicue’s appearance could be described as terrifying but, to me, it was familiar because for so many years I have been worshipping the Hindu goddess Kali. My Divine Mother Kali is the power of time that devours everything. She creates and she destroys. Awed to find my Divine Mother in Mexico City, I knelt on the museum marble floor and bowed before Coatlicue.

Just then I heard a booming voice behind me calling out, ‘Thank you, thank you!’ Suddenly, a man in uniform pulled up in a wheelchair next to me. ‘I am glad that you pay respect to our goddess,’ said Angel Rodriguez, a guide from the tourist office. He went on to explain that Coatlicue represents the creative power of Mother Earth as well as the three planes of the universe: heaven, earth, and the underworld. From her neck upward, she represents heaven. Instead of a head Coatlicue has two emerging serpents that symbolize the dual nature of life and her role as creator and destroyer.

According to Angel, Aztecs believed that all things originated from duality, from the feminine and masculine. The Aztecs also had a god of duality whose name is Ometecutli, which means in the Nahuatl language ‘two in one and one in two’. For Hindus, the Shiva-Shakti—male-female—principle is of utmost importance. The goddess Kali symbolizes duality through her four arms. Her right hands promise fearlessness and give boons, while her left hands hold a bloody sword and a severed demon head. One could call her right arms good and left ones bad but, in reality, she is beyond good and bad, just like

the sun cannot be called good or bad. Sunshine gives us life but can also scorch us. Kali's colour is deep bluish-black, and she stands on the prostrate body of her consort Shiva, whose complexion is pure white. She is the visible manifestation of his power. Without her Shiva cannot manifest, and without him Kali cannot exist. Shiva and Shakti are eternally united.

Angel quite actively moved around, considering that he was in a wheelchair. I could have a glimpse of his passionate devotion to this ancient mother goddess while watching him and listening to him as he pointed to different parts of this majestic Aztec goddess.

'From the neck to her skirt of snakes, Coatlicue manifests Earth,' said Angel. 'We see her arms turn into serpents. The serpent in old Mex-

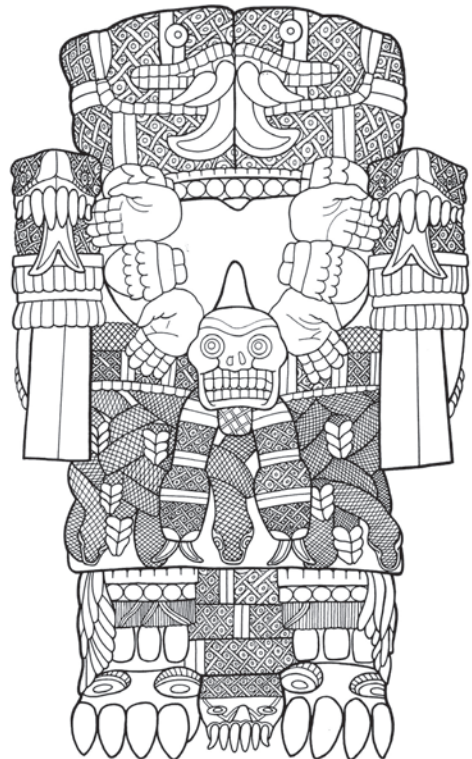
ico represents the reproductive power of Mother Earth. On the neck she has a necklace of hands and human hearts. The heart, according to Aztecs, is the centre of man, religion, and love. It is the beating pulse of life. Sacrificing the heart meant liberation of life blood, leaving the seed of life to germinate. Coatlicue's hands represent the act of giving life. Her stomach is a symbol of death, hence the representation of a large skull. 'When we die, we all go back to the womb of Mother Earth,' said Angel.

In Hindu iconography skulls are also present in the more fierce gods and goddesses. Mother Kali wears a garland of fifty skulls representing the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, which are the written form of sounds from which, Hindus believe, all creation evolved. One friend

*Image of Coatlicue at the  
National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico*



*Sketch of the image of Coatlicue  
detailing the original shape*



once pointed out that the skulls around Mother Kali's neck seem to be smiling. The skulls also symbolize our egos. When Mother cuts our ego, all tension is gone. Mother Kali wears a skirt of severed arms that represent our actions. While we are entitled to work, the result of our work belongs to her.

The middle portion of Coatlicue's body, from her skirt down to her feet, represents the underworld. Her feet are eagle claws that can dig into the earth and aid in agriculture. Underneath her serpent skirt, out of the maternal uterus, comes a serpent giving birth to the sun god named Huitzilopochtli.

According to the legend, Coatlicue was sweeping on top of Coatepec, a mountain of serpents, when she found a package of feathers. She hid the feathers under her skirt and shortly after found that she was pregnant with Huitzilopochtli. Her daughter, the moon, and her sons, the four hundred stars of the south became jealous and decapitated her. But she did not die because Huitzilopochtli protected her. Born a fully-grown man in a magical birth, Huitzilopochtli in warrior mode decapitated Coyolxauhqui, the moon, and cut off her arms and legs—hence the moon is round. 'The sun takes over the moon in order to give life to Mother Earth,' said Angel. 'Light overcomes darkness.'

Angel took me behind the statue of Coatlicue and pointed to a stone leaning against the pedestal the goddess stands on. This stone, which encompasses the soles of Coatlicue's feet, depicts a fourth universal plane—heaven and earth, and the underworld being the other three. It depicts the union of Tlaloc, the god of water and rain, and Tlaltecuctli, a sea serpent that is an embodiment of raging chaos before creation. Between them a round shield and a square within portrays the earth with its four cardinal points of north, south, east, and west. The earth—also rep-

resented by Tlali, Chimalma, and Tonantzin—is shown within as a circle.

'Long before Europeans, the ancient people of Mexico had the knowledge that the earth was round,' said Angel.

I asked, 'What happened? Why do people in Mexico no longer worship Coatlicue?'

'We've passed through a transition from a pre-Hispanic to the modern era,' said Angel. 'After Coatlicue, the mother of Aztec gods, came Chimalma, the circular earth; then Tonantzin, mother of gods and humans; and then the Virgin of Guadalupe.'

I was busy taking photographs of Coatlicue. The museum kindly allows photography provided one does not use flash. When I turned around, Angel was gone. He was gone so abruptly that I questioned in my mind whether he was real or not. Was he a physical form of the voice in my head I heard in the morning? He came quickly, gave me wise explanations, and then he was gone. I would have liked to ask him more about the goddess Tonantzin, who used to be worshipped on the hill of Tepeyac where Our Lady of Guadalupe first appeared.

Although I had the best intentions to go straight to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, fate had other plans. I was taken outside Mexico City to Teotihuacan, a vast archaeological site with a soaring sun pyramid and a huge moon pyramid linked by the wide Avenue of the Dead. Some scholars estimate that this city may have been established around 100 BCE and that by the fourth century some 200,000 people lived there. The city covers nearly eight square miles and was larger and more advanced than any European city of the time.

Still, to this day, Teotihuacan is shrouded in mystery, and nobody truly knows who founded this city—be they the Totonacs, Otomi, Zapotec, Mixtec, Maya, or Nahua peoples. Archaeologists



also found influences from the Olmecs and Toltecs. During the time of the Aztecs Teotihuacan was a place of pilgrimage, the place where the sun was born.

The Pyramid of the Sun is gigantic—738 feet at the base on each side and 207 feet high. When one looks up, one sees people on top appearing small like ants. I decided to climb up the steep ancient steps to the top of the pyramid. It was strenuous, and I sometimes had to pull myself up on a rope strung perpendicular to the steps, but it was definitely worth it. The view from the top is awesome, and I felt that I was sitting on a spiritual vortex that could blast me into the vast universe at any time.

Unfortunately, the uppermost portion of the pyramid had been destroyed. Today one can only imagine what a temple at the top of the sun pyramid must have looked like: columns with colourful paintings on the walls and priests in ornate headdresses running up and down the steps with offerings to the gods. When one hears about Aztec rituals, one is told about human blood sacrifice. Not only Aztecs performed blood sacrifice in the ancient world; the Bible refers to blood sacrifices too, and there are reports of isolated cases of human sacrifice in ancient India as well.

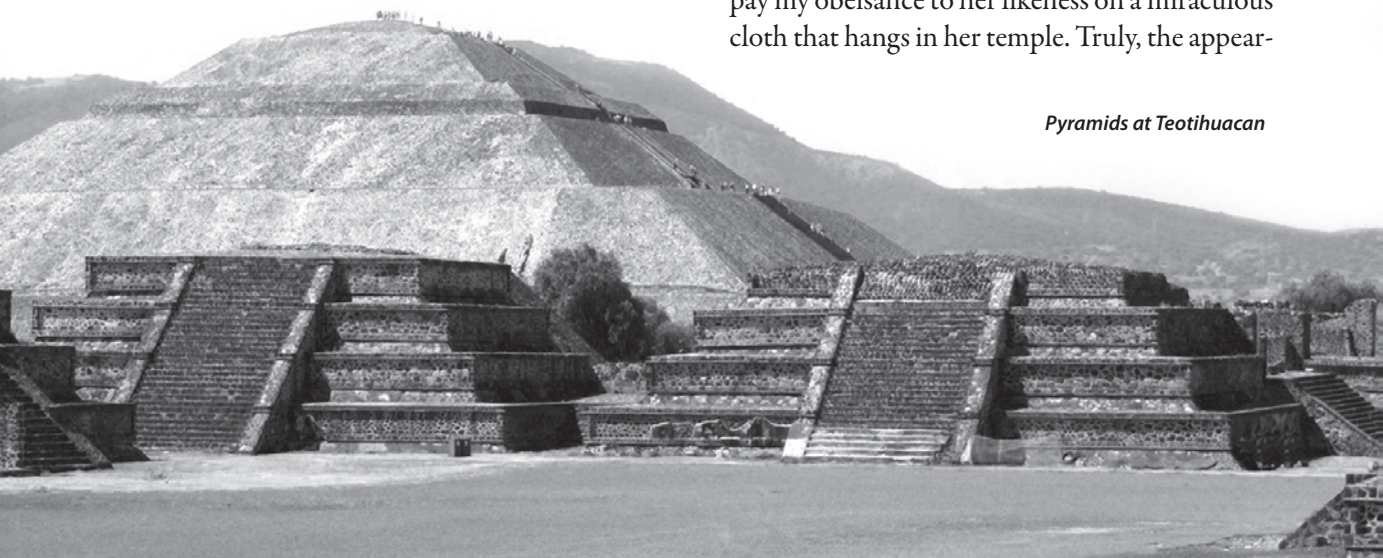
Today some Indian temples still perform animal sacrifice by offering goats or sheep to the goddess, though that is not common. Most people in modern India prefer to worship the goddess with red hibiscus flowers or red roses in lieu of blood.

History calls the Aztecs barbaric and bloodthirsty because they performed human sacrifice in order to worship their gods. There is little else known about their rituals besides ripping out human hearts and filling stone tubs full of blood. Surely, there must have been many other aspects to Aztec rituals. If I could go back in time and look at things through Aztec eyes, I would probably call Europeans of that age bloodthirsty and barbaric. Aztecs killed people to offer the most precious gift, namely human life, to propitiate and please their gods. Europeans, on the other hand, killed Aztecs for power and material gain. When the ancient Mother Goddess could no longer bear to see her indigenous children killed, she stepped in.

### ***Our Lady of Guadalupe, Saviour of Indigenous People***

I left the holy grounds of Teotihuacan and was finally en route to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Queen of Mexico and the Empress of the Americas. I came on a pilgrimage to pay my obeisance to her likeness on a miraculous cloth that hangs in her temple. Truly, the appear-

*Pyramids at Teotihuacan*





ance of Our Lady of Guadalupe ten years after the fall of Mexico City was miraculous.

The legend tells of Saint Juan Diego, a poor Indian native of Cuautitlan who walked on a cold December morning past the Tepeyac Hill. He saw a beautiful lady standing on top of the hill. Speaking to him in Nahuatl, the Holy Lady revealed to Juan Diego that she was the Divine Mother of God. She asked him to go to the bishop in the city and tell him to build a temple for her on this hill. Juan Diego followed her command and, although he managed to gain an audience with the Spanish archbishop, the bishop did not believe his story.

On his way back, Juan Diego passed the Tepeyac Hill and again saw the Holy Lady standing there. She told him to go back the following day and tell the bishop to build a temple for her on this hill. The second time Juan Diego came before the bishop, he was again met with disbelief. He dreaded to walk home past the hill of Tepeyac. When the Divine Lady appeared to him once more, Juan Diego plaintively asked her not to request him to see the bishop again; he pleaded that it was impossible to convince the bishop. The Lady smiled and commanded Juan Diego to climb up Tepeyac Hill and gather the Cas-

tilian roses blooming there and bring them to the bishop as proof. To his surprise, Juan Diego found roses blooming out of season on top of the hill.

Juan Diego went back to the bishop and, as instructed by the Holy Lady, opened his poncho to hand over the Castilian roses. To everyone's surprise an imprint of the Holy Lady of Tepeyac was clearly marked on the rough cloth of cactus fibres on Juan Diego's poncho. This was enough proof for the bishop and he fell to his knees. The Holy Lady, who spoke in Nahuatl to Juan Diego calling herself Coatloxopeuh—or perhaps Coatlicue—was renamed by the bishop as Our Lady of Guadalupe, after a Spanish town that was similar in sound.

A chapel dedicated to the Virgin was built on Tepeyac Hill over the ruins of a temple to the Aztec mother goddess

Tonantzin. The miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the cloth appealed to both conquerors and conquered. The Spanish saw an image of the Holy Mary, but the indigenous people saw the brown-skinned image of Tonantzin and, thereby, stopped resisting conversion to Christianity. This saved the lives of so many local people who previously resisted.



*Our Lady of Guadalupe*

The colour and form on this divine cloth has not faded since the 1500s. I stood in awe in front of the Divine Mother, grateful to church authorities who permit people to view this cloth from such close proximity. I sat down in the pews, taking in the holy atmosphere. The basilica is so spacious that it can accommodate the thousands of pilgrims that stream in daily. While the basilica's architecture reminded me of modern Catholic churches in Europe, the people with their passionate intensity of devotion took me back to the temples in India.

As I watched a priest perform mass assisted by a couple of altar boys, a procession of native Indians slowly passed the wide altar with its multiple steps. An old man was leading the procession, and I was fascinated by the loving way he carried a brightly-painted wooden statue of Our Lady. Watching his demeanour I did not doubt that the goddess he was carrying was dearer to him than his life's blood. I saw a woman moving slowly through the crowd on her knees toward Our Lady. Big tears flowed down the cheeks of her guileless face as she fixed her eyes on the Queen of her heart. Such intimacy with God is timeless. The ancient religion of Mexico is there—just masked by a Christian face.

### ***A Rocking Cradle of Lies***

When I got back to my hotel room, I remembered the voice in the morning with its running commentary on how Western influence on Mexico for the last five hundred years had stemmed the natural flow of ancient wisdom. In olden days the people of Mexico lived in a magical, sacred world of spirituality, but they were forced into a materialistic value system. Mexico's conquerors, in order to justify colonialism, resorted to rumours and masked the truth with clever distortions. If a lie is told with authority long

enough and often enough, people will be lulled into accepting it as the norm. It is not hard for ruthless leaders to get masses of good people thinking in negative stereotypes and to undermine the confidence of an entire nation.

In a materialistic society people measure success by how much wealth a person or a country has accumulated. Value is placed on an education that leads to a well-paying job in a competitive business community rather than on knowledge that leads to wisdom. I remember learning in school about the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution and that material progress meant that things will get better and better. In other words, our civilization today should be the most advanced one.

The first time I began to wonder about these materialistic claims was when I visited the caves of Ajanta in Maharashtra, India. These pillared halls resembled chapels I had seen in Europe—except that these caves had been carved into solid granite rock around 200 BCE. I cannot think of anyone today who would take the time to undertake such a work. Could anyone today figure out how to build a city like Machu Picchu high on a mountaintop using big boulders of rock that perfectly fit on top of each other without using cement? Looking at world events right now, materialism is on a collision course with nature. Our scientific knowledge has disturbed the rhythm of nature. Who can still read the signs of nature? Who can fix our dilemma?

An ancient story in India tells of a time when even the gods were exhausted from warring with demons. In times of trouble it is time for the Ancient Mother to stand up and fight for us. When the male gods heard that the great demon King Mahishasura had declared himself lord of heaven and ruler of the universe, they got angry. Each god shot forth a terrible light coming from

his forehead. Their rays joined at one point, and slowly the blazing concentration of light took the form of a mother goddess. The gods prayed to her and worshipped her with praise, ornaments, and weapons. 'Victory to the Mother,' they shouted as the goddess killed the demons and restored peace and tranquillity.

This story from the *Chandi*, India's famous scripture, has a deep meaning. The demons to be killed are not only outside ourselves, they also reside within us as anger, lust, and greed. Lust for more power and more wealth is a sign of materialistic thought. There never is enough money, never enough power to satiate human desire.

Greatness may be forgotten for some time but, sooner or later, it will rebound. Will Mexico be able to revive its ancient traditions and make them relevant for the present and future? Many years have gone by since I first visited Mexico City, but I still clearly remember the voice that taught me the ancient way—by situation rather than through books. I learned through experience and am grateful that I was introduced to Our Lady of Guadalupe through the ancient Mother Coatlicue. I humbly placed red roses at her feet.

The gods are waiting for worship. There is room for all gods and goddesses. In India there are so many temples dedicated to different manifestations of the same mother goddess. Churches exist side by side with Hindu temples and Muslim mosques. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. ... Devotees call on God alone, though by different names. They call one Person only. God is one, but His names are many.' The Divine Mother Coatlicue is ready to come out of the museum, ready to nurture and protect her children living in the holy land of Mexico.



(Continued from page 493)

2. To understand the process of *kāyasiddhi* see *A Brief History of Tantra Literature*, 26.
3. *A Brief History of Tantra Literature*, 454; see also Swami Harshananda, *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, 3 vols (Bangalore: Ramakrishna Math, 2008), 2.311–12.
4. For *khecari mudrā* see *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, 3.32–53; *Gheranda Samhita*, 'Tritiyopadesha', *mudrā prakaraṇa*, verses 25–32. Cf. *Shritantraloka*, 5.361–2.
5. For *vajrolī mudrā* see *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, 3.82–9; *Gheranda Samhita*, verses 45–8.
6. For *plāvini kumbhaka* see *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, 2.70–8.
7. For details on the awakening of the kundalini see *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, 3.97–123; *Gheranda Samhita*, 'Tritiyopadesha', *mudrā prakaraṇa*, verses 49–60. See also Arthur Avalon, *The Serpent Power* (Madras: Ganesh, 1958); V G Rele, *The Mysterious Kundalini*, (Bombay: D B Taraporewala, 1929); Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini: Path to Higher Consciousness* (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1976); and Mary Scott, *Kundalini in the Physical World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).
8. For the specific legend relating to Matsyendranatha and Gorakhanatha see Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition, Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice* (Delhi: Bhavana Books and Prints, 2002), 512.
9. George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kanphata Yogis* (Calcutta: YMCA Publishing House, 1938), 228–50.
10. Benjamin Walker, *Encyclopedia of Esoteric Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 77.
11. See *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Chapter 4.
12. Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, 2 vols (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983), 1.332–3.
13. See *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, 1.61–6.
14. Cf. *Shritantraviloka*, 11.33–8.
15. *Census of India* 1961, 5: Gujarat Part VII-B, *Fairs and Festivals* (Superintendent of Census Operations, Gujarat), 217–18. For sites and Yogashramas of Gorakhanatha in Nepal see *Kalyāṇa (Yogāṅka)* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1935), 784.
16. See *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, 1.56–7.

# ***Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age – III***

**Swami Bhajanananda**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

AT THE BEGINNING of our discussion on harmony of religions it was pointed out that every religion has three levels or dimensions: the social, the doctrinal, and the spiritual. It was also pointed out that harmony of religions should mean harmony at all the three levels. We have discussed so far only the first two levels, namely the social and the doctrinal. We now come to the third level, the spiritual or mystical. It is at this level that Sri Ramakrishna made the greatest contribution to the understanding of religion.

It is generally believed that religions differ only in their external and doctrinal aspects such as rituals, mythologies, institutions, creeds, dogmas, whereas at the transcendental or mystical level they do not differ. But if we study the mystical experiences described in different scriptures or described by saints of different religions, we find there is great variation in the descriptions. The mystical experiences of the Hindu Mira, the Christian Teresa, and the Muslim Rabia are not the same. Even within Hinduism the transcendental experiences described in Advaita treatises, in Vaishnava scriptures, in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, in the tantras, and in other texts show wide variation. In the Vedanta system itself there are different schools such as Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, Advaita, and each school has its own view of transcendental experience.

This means that harmony of religions has to be established at the transcendent experiential

level as well. Harmony at this level can be established only by a person who has had different types of transcendent mystic experiences. In the history of humanity Sri Ramakrishna is the only person who traversed the spiritual paths of different religions and sects and attained transcendent experiences through all of them. How has he established harmony at the level of transcendent experience? He did not stop with those experiences; he went beyond all of them and saw that all transcendent experiences described in books or by illumined sages are only varied expressions of the knowledge of the ultimate Reality, which cannot be described in words. He gave the example of the salt doll. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean, but got dissolved in the process. Similarly, at the highest state of realization of the ultimate Reality, all distinctions disappear; it is a state that can never be described. And this state can be attained through all paths.

***Harmony within Hinduism*** • Among the religions of the world Hinduism is a wonder. It has no beginning and no founder. It has great capacity for adaptation and for absorbing cultures and races, and is an ever-growing religion. Even after more than five thousand years of history it is still quite young and full of vitality. Its diversity is mind-boggling. In fact, it is not a single religion but a conglomeration of several religions, sects, cults, and philosophies. It has been compared to a vast sprawling banyan tree that



has, apart from a main stem, several other stems and hundreds of branches. However, all the diverse elements of Hinduism are held together by a mystic sense of unity and by an attitude of reconciliation, acceptance, and harmony maintained by its followers.

This sense of unity and harmony prevailed in Hinduism till the Middle Ages, when it was disrupted partly by foreign invasions and the resulting loss of political power and freedom, and partly by the rise of several sects and systems of philosophy. Disharmony and conflicts appeared at three levels: the religious, the philosophical, and the social.

Religious conflicts came to the fore with the rise of sects, especially Vaishnava and Shaiva sects in North India and South India. Philosophical conflicts appeared when different systems of Hindu philosophy such as Buddhist, Mimamsa, and Nyaya-Vaisheshika came into existence. Acharya Shankara's establishment of the supremacy of Advaita Vedanta sparked the rise of several dualistic schools within Vedanta itself. At the social level large-scale conversion of Hindus into other religions and the rigidification of the caste system were the main cause of conflicts.

To remedy the above situation several auto-corrective social movements, such as the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, the Theosophical Society, and others came into operation in the early part of the nineteenth century. But these reform movements did not take Hinduism as a whole. Their work instead of unifying Hinduism only led to further splintering of the religion and the creation of new sects. This was the situation that prevailed in India in the middle of the nineteenth century when Sri Ramakrishna appeared on the scene. The actual task of bringing about the unification of Hinduism was accomplished by Swami Vivekananda.

Swamiiji presented Sri Ramakrishna to the

world not as the propounder of a new doctrine or as the founder of a new sect, but as the rejuvenator of the whole Hinduism. Swamiiji showed how the eternal truths of the Hindu religion found their verification in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, how Sri Ramakrishna relived the experiences of the sages and saints of the past, and how Sri Ramakrishna's message reconciled the philosophical standpoints of all Hindu sects. In this way, with Sri Ramakrishna as the centre, Swami Vivekananda has brought about an overall unification of Hinduism.

As regards the caste problem Swami Vivekananda held that, although caste is associated with the Hindu religion, it is not a religious problem but a social one. The solution of the problem lies not in pulling down those who are higher in the caste hierarchy, but in raising up those who are lower to the highest level. The 'brahmana' represents an ideal, an ideal person who has attained purity of mind, spiritual knowledge, and unselfishness and devotes his life to the welfare of all. The aim of social life should be to raise everyone, from the lowest to the highest caste, including the brahmanas, to become the ideal 'brahmana'. This is Swami Vivekananda's solution to the caste problem.



*Cotton pillow used by Sri Ramakrishna*

This is not an impractical proposition. It is being actively put into practice in the Ramakrishna movement. Modern education is also helping to remove caste barriers. As a matter of fact, right before our eyes a new casteless society is taking shape in India. Although its members are not many, it is bound to become a major trend in future decades.

About caste distinction Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Devotees have no caste.' About the solution to the caste problem he said:

The caste-system can be removed by one means only, and that is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. The mind, body, and soul of a man become purified through divine love. Chaitanya and Nityananda scattered the name of Hari to everyone, including the par-

iah, and embraced them all. A brahmin without this love is no longer a brahmin. And a pariah with the love of God is no longer a pariah. Through bhakti an untouchable becomes pure and elevated.<sup>14</sup>

**Harmony of Spiritual Paths** • Through his life and message, Sri Ramakrishna has brought about not only harmony among religions as well as harmony and integration within Hinduism, but also harmony of spiritual paths. In Hinduism the term 'spiritual path' is indicated by two words: yoga and *mārga*. By yoga is meant any technique of transformation of human consciousness into divine consciousness. Vedanta teachers accept three yogas: jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, and karma yoga. To this Swami Vivekananda added a fourth one: raja yoga. By *mārga* is meant *mukti-mārga*, the highway to mukti, liberation. Vedanta teachers recognize only two *mārgas*: *jñāna-mārga* and *bhakti-mārga*—a third highway, known as *karma-mārga*, was started by the Mimamsakas in the early centuries of the Christian Era, but as a result of the polemical attacks on it by Acharya Shankara and other Vedanta teachers it did not survive long.

The two highways are based on different premises. In *jñāna-mārga* the ultimate Reality, Brahman, is regarded as impersonal, without any attributes, *nirguna*. In *bhakti-mārga* Brahman is regarded as personal, endowed with attributes, *saguna*. In *jñāna-mārga*, mukti is regarded as a state in which individuality, I-consciousness, is completely lost and the individual Self becomes one with the supreme Self, Brahman. In *bhakti-mārga* mukti is regarded as a state of union of the individual Self with the supreme Self, in which individuality remains distinct and enjoys the bliss of divine communion for ever. In *jñāna-mārga* knowledge is regarded as the only direct means of attaining mukti. In *bhakti-mārga* devotion is regarded as the only means of attaining mukti.

Wooden stool used by Sri Ramakrishna



Advaitic teachers regard *jñāna-mārga* as the only true highway to mukti, whereas the dualistic teachers regard *bhakti-mārga* as the only true pathway to mukti. The first attempt to reconcile the two *mārgas* was made by Sri Krishna in the Gita. But later Vedantic teachers interpreted the Gita in such a way as to make the scripture appear to support their own respective views. The second great attempt to reconcile *jñāna-mārga* and *bhakti-mārga* was made by Sri Ramakrishna. From his own realization, Sri Ramakrishna taught that at the highest transcendent level jnana and bhakti lose their distinctions and become one; the same happens with the distinction between *saguna* and *nirguna*. These distinctions are created by the human mind at the lower level and have no meaning at the highest transcendent level. Furthermore, Sri Ramakrishna taught that through divine grace even a bhakta who follows *bhakti-mārga* can have knowledge of Brahman as the impersonal Absolute.

Sri Ramakrishna has spoken on this subject several times. Once he said: 'The path of knowledge leads to Truth, as does the path that combines knowledge and love. The path of love, too, leads to this goal. The way of love is as true as the way of knowledge. All paths ultimately lead to the same Truth' (104).

As regards the controversy about the nature of Reality, attained through different paths, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'He who is called Brahman by the jnanis is known as Atman by the yogis and as Bhagavan by the bhaktas. The same brahmin is called priest, when worshipping in the temple, and cook, when preparing a meal in the kitchen. ... But the Reality is one and the same. The difference is only in name. He who is Brahman is verily the Atman, and again, He is Bhagavan' (133–4). In another place Sri Ramakrishna said: 'God has form and He is formless too. Further,

He is beyond both form and formlessness. No one can limit Him' (192).

It is important to keep in mind the distinction between *mārga* and yoga. All the four yogas find application in both the *mārgas*. In *bhakti-mārga* the bhakta practises karma yoga; raja yoga, in the form of meditation; jnana yoga, in the form of discrimination between the Atman and the world; and finally bhakti yoga. Similarly, in *jñāna-mārga* the jnani also has his own karma yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, and jnana yoga.

But when it is stated that through any one yoga it is possible to realize God and attain mukti, then it should be understood that the term 'yoga' is used in the sense of *mārga*. When, for instance, Swami Vivekananda states that karma yoga by itself can lead to mukti, here 'karma yoga' is used in the sense of *karma-mārga*.

One noteworthy point in Sri Ramakrishna's views on spiritual paths is that he never condemned any path as wrong. Even about the Kartabhaja sect, which followed certain immoral practices in the name of sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna said it was like entering a house by the small door at the back of a house formerly used by scavengers to enter the house. According to him, any path, if sincerely followed, can lead ultimately to the supreme Goal. The one thing he insisted on was sincerity, *āntarikatā*.

**Harmony of Spiritual Life and Social Life** • Sri Ramakrishna's repeated references to *kāminī-kāñcan*, woman and gold, as maya and the main cause of bondage may give the impression that he was against householder's life and social obligations. But the truth is that he fully understood and approved the necessity of marriage for most people and the importance of fulfilling family obligations. He could have avoided his own marriage if he had been against it. But he not only gave his consent to it, he even chose his bride. Apparently, he did so in order to set a

new ideal for householders. Although he trained a group of young men to become monks and gave them a different type of advice, he never allowed or encouraged any of his householder disciples, including the great Nag Mahashay, to renounce the world.

Sri Ramakrishna was full of praise for householders who lived a spiritual life facing innumerable challenges and difficulties in life, as the following extract shows:

Addressing Ishan, a householder devotee, the Master said: 'Blessed indeed is the householder who performs his duties in the world, at the same time cherishing love for the Lotus Feet of God. He is indeed a hero. He is like a man who carries a heavy load of two maunds on his head and at the same time watches a bridal procession. One cannot lead such a life without great spiritual power. Again, such a man is like the mudfish, which lives in the mud but is not stained by it. Further, such a householder may be compared to a waterfowl. It is constantly diving under water; yet, by fluttering its wings only once, it shakes off all trace of wet (856).

The major parts of his recorded conversations were held with householders, and the bulk of his teachings were addressed to them. How to lead an intensely spiritual life while discharging the duties of a householder is the central theme of his talks. It is true that he greatly stressed the need for spiritual practices such as prayer, japa, meditation, discrimination, and so forth. But he was also a great teacher of karma yoga. He has repeatedly pointed out that unless one is very much advanced on the spiritual path or has developed intense love for God, one cannot give up work. Work, duties, and obligations of life drop off naturally when a person is advanced on the spiritual path. As he put it: 'When the fruit appears the blossom drops off. Love of God is the fruit, and rituals are the blossom. When the

daughter-in-law of the house becomes pregnant, she cannot do much work. Her mother-in-law gradually lessens her duties in the house' (465). The original word used in Bengali is 'karma', which means both 'rituals' and 'work'.

All work should be done selflessly by surrendering the fruit of one's actions to God. Furthermore, one should live in the world without becoming attached to anybody. How to live in the world without becoming attached? This question was put to Sri Ramakrishna on several occasions, and he answered using illustrations to support his explanation. He said:

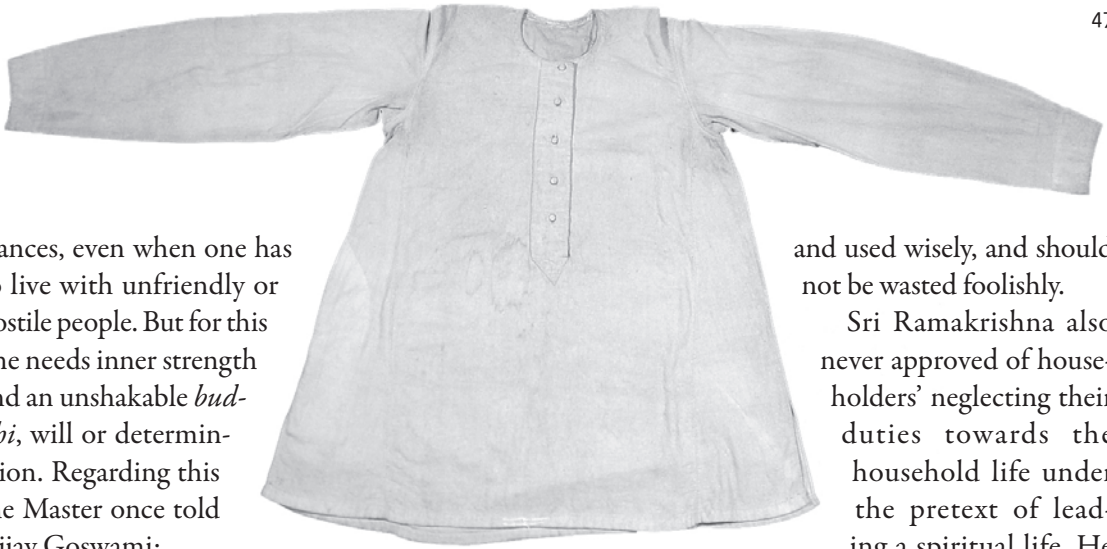
Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all—with wife and children, father and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.

A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her master's children as if they were her own. ... But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all (81).

Sri Ramakrishna taught that it is possible to lead an intensely spiritual life along with discharging one's duties of life. But this needs practice. He calls it *abhyāsa-yoga*, the yoga of practice, about which Sri Krishna also speaks in the twelfth chapter of the Gita. For this Sri Ramakrishna gives the illustration of the rice-flakes seller. With one hand she operates the wooden pestle, with the other hand she nurses her child, and along with this she sells rice-flakes and bargains with the customers. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that one should hold on to the lotus feet of the Lord with one hand and do worldly duties with the other hand.

Sri Ramakrishna also taught that spiritual life can be lived even under unfavourable circum-





Shirt made of flannel worn by Sri Ramakrishna

stances, even when one has to live with unfriendly or hostile people. But for this one needs inner strength and an unshakable *buddhi*, will or determination. Regarding this the Master once told Vijay Goswami:

‘He who is a devotee of God must have an understanding that cannot be shaken under any conditions. He must be like the anvil in a blacksmith’s shop. It is constantly being struck by the hammer; still it is unshaken. Bad people may abuse you very much and speak ill of you; but you must bear with them all if you sincerely seek God. Isn’t it possible to think of God in the midst of the wicked?’ (560).

Sri Ramakrishna’s attitude towards wealth is to be understood in the right perspective. It is true that his mind had become so sensitive that he could not touch money. But this does not mean that he was against the earning of wealth by householders. What he condemned was excessive attachment to wealth. He said: ‘He alone is a true man who has made money his servant. But those who do not know the use of money are not men even though they have human forms’ (637).

About the proper use of money Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘Money enables a man to get food and drink, build a house, worship the Deity, serve devotees and holy men, and help the poor when he happens to meet them. These are the good uses of money. Money is not meant for luxuries or creature comfort or for buying a position in society’ (285). In other words, money should be invested

and used wisely, and should not be wasted foolishly.

Sri Ramakrishna also never approved of householders’ neglecting their duties towards the household life under the pretext of leading a spiritual life. He scolded some of the men

who came to stay at Dakshineswar leaving their wives and children to the mercies of friends and relatives.

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of two kinds of yoga or means of attaining union with God: *mano* yoga, which means mental disciplines such as meditation, *japa*, and the like; and *karma* yoga, which means performance of selfless work. He has stated clearly: ‘If a householder or a man belonging to the other stages of life performs action without attachment, then he is united with God through such action’ (388).

How does *karma* yoga bring about union with God? Selfless work, *niṣkāma-karma*, purifies the mind, and in the purified mind dawns love for God, which leads to God realization. However, Sri Ramakrishna has pointed out that it is very difficult to do work selflessly.

The above discussion shows how Sri Ramakrishna has harmonized spiritual life with the fulfilment of the duties of life and social obligations. It is possible to lead a completely God-centred life even while living in society as an active member of it and convert one’s whole life into an undivided consecration to God. This aspect of Sri Ramakrishna’s life and teachings was fully manifested in the life of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

**Harmony of the Ancient and the Modern** • In an earlier section of this article we discussed Sri Ramakrishna's life as the culmination of five thousand years of the spiritual life of the Indian people. He relived the whole range of spiritual experiences of the sages and saints of India, from Vedic times to the modern age, and integrated into his soul the spiritual consciousness of not only the avatars and deities of Hinduism but also of the founders of other religions. Hence, Sri Ramakrishna's inner life may be said to be an epitome of ancient spirituality.

It should be noted here that this reliving or 'recapitulation' of ancient spirituality was achieved not in the middle of a forest or in an inaccessible mountain cave, but in modern times in a modern society, in the environs of a modern temple. Outwardly, in his food, dress, and other habits such as smoking, chewing betel leaves, using of footwear, mode of travelling, manners and way of talking, there was nothing to distinguish Sri Ramakrishna from the average middle-class Bengali of his times. His inner spirituality was in perfect harmony with his outer life.

*Embroidered sitting carpet made of cotton  
used by Sri Ramakrishna*



He was quite modern in his outlook, views, and approach to the problems of life. He was in sympathy with the spirit of the modern age. He had no difficulty in dealing with agnosticism, rationalism, humanism, non-conformism, liberalism with regard to social life, and other aspects of the modern spirit. Some of his disciples—like Narendra, Mahendra Nath Gupta, and the physician and scientist Dr Mahendra Lal Sarkar—were adherents of the modern spirit. Sri Ramakrishna did not disapprove their attitudes or try to change them. On the contrary, he encouraged them to hold to their own beliefs, attitudes, and convictions. This was because he knew that behind their apparent agnosticism and rationalism there was a sincere quest for the ultimate Truth and everlasting peace. Sri Ramakrishna also knew only too well that the spirit will ultimately triumph over matter—spiritual truths have the intrinsic power to manifest themselves, breaking through the veils of agnosticism, materialism, secularism, and other negative aspects of the modern age.

Thus we find that although Sri Ramakrishna was in his inner being an inexhaustible reservoir of ancient spiritual knowledge and wisdom he was quite modern and progressive in his outer life. He was internally ancient and externally modern. He is indeed the connecting link and symbol of the harmony between the ancient and the modern. It may not be out of place to mention here that, just as Sri Ramakrishna is the connecting link between the ancient and the modern, so is Swami Vivekananda the connecting link between the East and the West.

### **Principle of Acceptance**

We have discussed above five types of harmony that Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught: harmony of religions, harmony of sects within Hinduism, harmony of spiritual paths, harmony of spiritual life and social life, and harmony of the ancient

and the modern. As mentioned earlier these five types of harmony were not merely a matter of toleration and social accommodation. They were derived from a true vision and understanding of Reality and were based on two fundamental principles that Sri Ramakrishna seemed to have followed in his life.


The first principle is unity in diversity. Sri Ramakrishna had realized that underpinning all the diversity of the phenomenal world there is the substratum of infinite, unchanging, unbroken, non-dual consciousness. All the diversities finally lead to a basic unity. Having established himself in the basic unitary consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna could see harmony in all forms of diversity.

The second principle is of acceptance. Sri Ramakrishna accepted diversity as a part of the divine plan. It should be noted that Sri Ramakrishna did not try to find the common ground among religions or among the sects of Hinduism, nor did he try to 'harmonize' religions or sects. He simply accepted all religions and sects as they are, with all their differences. He did not try to iron out or reconcile those differences. He just accepted them as the unique features of religions and sects.

Conflicts and quarrels arise only when people refuse to accept diversity—diversity of religions, diversity of sects, diversity of human temperaments, and so forth. Conflicts and quarrels arise when people take the stand that their religion alone is true and all other religions are false, that is, they are not religions at all. They claim that they believe in an omniscient and omnipotent God but, at the same time, they refuse to see that God himself must have created diverse religions and that diversity is a part of God's plan of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna accepted religions and sects as they are. Where others saw conflicts, he saw harmony; where others saw error and falsehood,

he saw truth and reality. To establish harmony among religions it is not necessary to formulate any big theories. All that is needed is to simply allow people to follow their own religions or sects without disturbing others. Religious conflicts arise when religious leaders with their narrow views and ignorance of other religions spread dogmatism and fanaticism among common people. In recent years religion has come to be associated with politics in many countries, especially in India. This has aggravated religious conflicts and made religion one of the chief causes of social violence and unrest. Regarding this Swami Vivekananda says: 'Now, in my little experience I have collected this knowledge—that for all the devilry that religion is blamed with, religion is not at all in fault: no religion ever persecuted men, no religion ever burnt witches, no religion ever did any of these things. What then incited people to do these things? Politics, but never religion; and if such politics takes the name of religion whose fault is that?'<sup>15</sup>

There are, however, signs that the situation is changing fast. The Internet is bringing people all over the world closer to one another. Through the Internet people are coming to know about other religions and are able to appreciate the good points in them. They are learning to think for themselves independent of the influence of religious leaders. Harmony of religions is no longer a matter to be decided by religious leaders. It is being taken up and practised by the common people. The ideas of harmony that Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught are now practised more and more by people in many countries, although many of them may not know about Sri Ramakrishna or his message of universal harmony. 

## **References and Notes**

14. *Gospel*, 155.
15. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 4.125.

# Significance of the Term Putra in Vedic Literature

Kamalika Mazumder

(Continued from the previous issue)

BESIDES BEING TREATED as a child and though primarily a male god, Agni assumes feminine forms too: 'You, divine Agni, are Aditi to the donor of the oblation; you are Hotra and Bharati and thrive by praise; you are Ila of a hundred winters to him who makes you gifts; you, lord of wealth, are the destroyer of Vritra (Indra), Saraswati.'<sup>21</sup> Agni is also said to be *dvāro devi*, 'wide be the doors, goddess' (2.3.5); and because of his purity he is described as a beloved 'wife' (1.73.3). These comparisons are possible because Agni is treated as a divine child, where gender becomes superfluous. Again, the children of Aditi are hailed as *putra* (7.60.5, 1.72.9), irrespective of whether the children are named. Aditi is the mother of the gods, and in one mantra we have: 'Aditi is heaven; Aditi is the firmament; Aditi is mother, father, and son; Aditi is all the gods; Aditi is the five classes of men; Aditi is generation and birth' (1.89.10).

This clearly states *putra* to be gender neutral, and a predominantly matriarchal concept is also evident here. Indra is called upon to drink the *soma* juice, as the 'sons' invite their father to partake of food (1.130.1). This act of calling their father to a meal is usually done by a girl child. As in this instance, the use of the word *putra* definitely includes a female. Except for some names like Mamateya Dirghatama, Ausija Kaksivana, Vajineyo Bharadvaja, Vadhri matya

Hiranyahasta, Prasne Putrah all the children are named after their father seers. Male gods also outnumber the female deities, an argument that has been used to support that Rig Vedic Aryans' society had entered the patriarchal phase. Gods like Agni, Indra, Maruts, Ashwins become fathers to their worshippers. But throughout the Vedas, especially in the Rig and Atharva Vedas, the biological entity of a father and his contribution to impregnate the fertile field or womb of a mother are repeatedly emphasized. The goddesses Raka and Sinivali are connected with parturition and the formation of the embryo. They bestow wealth upon a child. Mahi, the earth goddess, is the mother of the vegetal world as well as of Indra and the other gods. In the concept of *dyāvāprthivī*, father heaven and mother earth, all the gods are their offspring (1.185.4).

Thus, the fertility cult becomes part of the Supreme Mother cult. The instance of Aditi enlightens us with the fact that since she begets children the father becomes unimportant. Besides, the biological entity of a mother is also much less important than her supreme philosophical presence, which is further expressed in Saraswati, who is *virpatni*, bride of the hero (6.49.7), and is eulogised as *ambitame*, the best of mothers (2.41.16). As procreation was linked more to the father than the mother, children were commonly named after their fathers. Madhuchanda,



the seer of the first ten hymns of the Rig Veda, is clearly described as *vaiśvāmitrasya putra*, the child of Vishvamitra.<sup>22</sup> Madhuchanda becomes Madhuchandas in the *Aitareya Brahmana* and is treated by later scholars as a son. Skandaswami, the pre-Sayana commentator, clearly described the sage as *viśvāmitrasya putra*. But *chanda*, metre, is a neuter word, and to conceive of it as a female one has to modify the last syllable to get the feminine form: *chandā*—though Madhuchanda is not conceived of as a female seer in Saunaka's list (fifth century BCE).<sup>23</sup> That the same expression can be equally used for a male and female seer is evident in the name Suradhas (1.100.17), which is another name found in the Rig Veda and is also the seer of the hymn. The seers of that hymn are said to be Varsagirah, children of Vrisagirah. Skandaswami figures out that Rijrasva, Ambarisa, Sahadeva, Bhayamana, and Suradha are Vrisagirah's *putrah*,<sup>24</sup> and all are considered sons of Vrisagirah by later commentators of the Rig Veda. But Suradha is of course a female seer and can never be a masculine name. Probably Suradha was the sister and the youngest of all the other brothers, but all are clubbed together as Varsagirah. We can note again that no gender discrimination was made with regard to the word *putra*. Indra is said to have procreated Surya, sun, Usha, dawn, Prithivi, earth, and Agni, fire (3.31.15)—these are the names of gods and goddesses put together in the same fashion as the *putrah* of Vrisagirah. As Sinivali, the sister of the devas, is offered oblations, so sisters—like the wives of Rig Vedic society—definitely performed Vedic rituals. The example of Suradha proves the point. We have another example in the seer Gotamo Nodha<sup>25</sup>—Nodha was the child of Gotama, and his gender is still being questioned.

How a father and a mother help their children is exemplified by the Ribhus, gods of the

rains, who help all living organisms by creating grass in upper lands and water in lower surfaces.<sup>26</sup> In the preceding mantra *putrebhyāḥ* denotes all living organisms, children of the manes. The Ashwins, the twin gods, are said to be *subhaga putrāḥ*, auspicious offspring (1.181.4). Agni becomes the *putra* of one who serves and nourishes it (2.1.9). As the *putrāḥ* obey the father, the sacrificer abides by the dictum of Agni (1.68.5). The rays of the sun, though basically imagined to be feminine because they bear water, are also said to be masculine since they are responsible for rains, which increase fertility. But Indra becomes the *pati*, master, of *raśmi*, rays, who are the offspring of Agni (1.69.4). In the 'Narayana Suktam'<sup>27</sup> Agni's *raśmaya*, rays, are stated to be *santata*, continuously spreading, and this gives Agni its condition of being omnipresent and omnipotent, with its light spreading to all parts of the body. For the luminescent Indra, Agni issues many mighty children, *mahasputrā*, in the form of rays, which are treated as feminine in the hymn of the Rig Veda.<sup>28</sup> The all-knowing father's father is eulogised as Aditya, sun, who receives this epithet because of being the father of its rays, which in turn are the parents of the earth (1.164.16). And we know that Aditi is the supreme goddess behind Aditya. The sun is the source of all life. In the mother's womb develop many a *prajā*, children, who are *nirṛthimā viveśa*, covered with ignorance, (1.164.32). Here *putra* and *prajā* become synonymous.

The inheritance laws for the son and daughter were almost similar in those days. He who serves Brahmanaspati, father and mother of the gods, is awarded with wealth for himself, his relatives, his own people, race, and children (2.26.3). So, if the *duhitā*, daughter, of a father without sons gives birth to both a son and a daughter, the grandson performs sacrifices and the granddaughter is honoured with wealth (3.31.1–2). The *duhitā*

does not obtain her father's riches, though her daughter inherits them. This wealth cannot be enjoyed by the father's daughter but only by her child. Unmarried daughters could perform rituals also, and in one mantra a virtuous *dubhitā* is found praying for wealth from her parents (2.17.7). From all this we can conclude that property laws in those days were very flexible. There was no hard and fast rule. Parents gave wealth to their children, so Indra is asked to donate wealth to the Vashishtas (7.32.3).

The families of seers, like all the children of the Vishvadevas, are treated in the same manner as the children of the luminous gods, who are asked to bestow wealth upon people for collective enjoyment (8.27.22). The god Vastospati protects and nourishes the Vashishtas, as the father protects his sons (7.54.2). In a hymn to the clouds the god Parjanya is recognised as coming down from father sky and causing fertility and progeny to mother earth (7.102.2). Through this process mother earth acquires nourishment from Parjanya and grows rich. Here the god Isha and all living beings as well are referred to as Parjanya. As Parjanya comes out from *antarikṣa*, sky, it is called *divasputra* (7.102.1). *Div* means heaven or light; as the sun, or lighting, gives birth to Parjanya, who pours rain, it is thus called *divasputra* (6.9.2). It is the sun god who is the child of Agni, and Agni alone knows the Vedic rituals and their significance. This hymn uttered during a king's venturing out for war asks the bows to protect the king as the mother protects her child. Again, at the time of war the bow, like a mother, releases its arrows (6.75.5). So the woman is to be protected and her welfare given importance. In the hymn by Prajavana the sacrificer's desire for offspring, *putrakāma*, is said to bring children to him. His wife, also longing for offspring, is said to have at first given birth to *prajā*—the word *prajā*, as

mentioned above, is synonymous with *putra*. The *hota* declares that at the macro level he impregnates the flora and fauna, the earth, and the universe. He has even impregnated another woman apart from his wife for the sake of progeny or the procreation of progeny (10.183.1–3). All this shows how important was progeny or the increase of population of one's race for continuous wars, agriculture, cattle-rearing, and various other occupations.

The female seer Ghosha, in a hymn to the Ashvins, says: 'I here invoke you ... give me (wealth) as parents give to a *putra*' (10.39.6). As there was no lack of women seers and the education of women was also prevalent in Vedic times the children in general, and not sons in particular, received knowledge from their parents. In a well known hymn of the Rig Veda, in which appears the famous sentence '*Śṛṇvantu viśve amritasya pūtrā ā ye dhāmāni divyāni tasthu*' (10.13.1), the seer Vivasvan makes his clarion call to be heard by all the children of immortality in this world and also by the gods living in heavens. We see that in this hymn all the living beings are taken together as the offspring of immortality. In another hymn we find the mention of the gods as '*divasputrāso asurasya vīrāḥ*'; asura's heroes and the sons of heaven' (3.53.7). Usha is also a luminous goddess and, though obviously included within the *divasputrāso*, is treated as *suryasya dubhitā*, daughter of the sun (3.53.15). Children were counted as wealth, which included heroes as well as horses and cattle (5.4.11).

### Putra and Dubhitā

A daughter is called *kanyā* before and even after she is married. A grown-up daughter is always addressed by her father as *dubhitā*. The husband addresses his wife as *strī* or *patnī*. While a grown-up son continued to give his parental acquaintance and lineage, *dubhitā* was the special

name given to the grown-up daughter, whose occupation had significance. The *dubhitā* does the milking of cows, which was considered to be one of the primary and prestigious occupations in agricultural and pastoral families. The cow was a source of *rāyi*, wealth, as it gives milk, which the *dubhitā* extracted. The *dubhitā* was also named so because the parental wealth that she inherited was extracted from her parents and taken along with her to another family after marriage. Usha is the *dubhitā* of the sun and its essence, and is called so because she extracts the sun's property of light (3.53.15, 1.116.17, 1.117.13). The *dubhitā* of Agni is again said to be the day or the dawn personified in Usha (1.71.5). Agni has the property of heat and light; the innermost core of his flames is his hottest part, while his soft and mellow radiation reveals the blue and red of the dawn, Usha. Therefore, Agni's heat and light is wrung out by Usha to dispel the night. In yet another hymn both the day and the night are said to be *dubhitarā*, daughters, of the sun (6.49.3). The sun contains both the day and the night.

In the tenth mandala of the Rig Veda we find Daksha as the *putra* of Aditi, the mother, who in turn is the *dubhitā* of Daksha (10.72.5). Aditi, the mother, is not dead but lives in Daksha, her *putra*, and becomes his *dubhitā* in turn. So a *dubhitā* can be mother and daughter at the same time. This includes the occupational definition of *putra*. While we have seen before that *putra*—*put-tra*—means also to procreate, to save, this function becomes important in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* and in texts like the *Kaushitaki Brahmana Upanishad*, through which we can realize that Aditi is at the same time a mother and daughter; as mother she gives birth to Daksha, who in turn becomes the father of Aditi. The Upanishad says that when the father dies, he transmits his speech,

mind, and life into the offspring and becomes immortal. In the *Kaushitaki Brahmana Upanishad* too it is said that the father lives in his child. Hence the idea of Aditi being both the mother and daughter of Daksha is reasonable.

In a verse of the Rig Veda Sachi says: '*Mama putrāḥ śatruhaṇo'ṭho me dubhitā virāt*; my sons are the slayers of my enemies, my daughter is an empress' (10.159.3). This means that Sachi's *dubhitā* may have been singled out from all her valorous children due to her noble work of milking the cow in addition to fighting wars and killing foes, the mother herself participating in the latter act. Or the *dubhitā* may not have been one of her children but an employee who did this work and was considered praiseworthy and honourable. In a hymn of the Rig Veda occurs: '*putriṇā tā kumārīṇā*; youthful and adolescent offspring' (8.31.8). This is H H Wilson's translation, but Griffith translates it as: 'with sons and daughters.'<sup>29</sup> The want for *pumsaḥ putram*, male offspring, is expressed in the first mandala of the Rig Veda.<sup>30</sup> Secondly *sūnu*, *toka*, *tanaya*, *apatya* are all general terms used in the Rig Veda as *putra* is used. While *toka* literally means the seed that can grow into either sex, *tanaya*—often compounded with *toka*—means child. The word *apatya* can be split into *apa-tya*, which carries the meaning of 'going beyond'.<sup>31</sup> In *sūnu* the root *su* means 'to bring forth' or 'to give birth to', and clearly points towards 'child'. Though the desire for a female offspring is not mentioned separately in the Rig Veda, the female child growing into the unmarried *dubhitā* or the married or marriageable *kanyā* were held in great esteem.

The urge for a male offspring might have come from other societies or races of a definite character, with whom the Aryans intermixed and produced an amalgam of cultures that incorporated the preferences of those cultures. The

asuras, demons, were great rivals of the *suras*, devas, but in the Brahmanas both are celebrated as the offspring of Prajapati, the Creator. The settled agriculturists, the groups of devas, were performing sacrifices that the physically powerful asuras would not tolerate in the forests. These looters, together with the *dasyus*, aborigines, defeated the devas in several battles. The *Aitareya Brahmana* suggests that due to this the devas felt endangered and elected a leader amongst them under whom they could fight successfully against the asuras.<sup>32</sup> This leader would be *rājā*, the most shining and capable among them. The raja, king, needed *virāḥ*, heroes, for continuous wars; hence, the desire for having physically strong *pumsa putrāḥ*.

The Mahabharata states that in the beginning there were only the brahmanas.<sup>33</sup> Then, due to the difference in their occupations, the brahmanas themselves got divided into various castes. The division of the sexes became a prominent factor. The Rig Veda mentions the ancient predecessors of the seers of the hymns, like the Angirasas. This suggests that the seers also had predecessors. There was no discrimination between sexes in society before the institution of marriage. The term *putra* and its neutrality addresses this aspect of the social fabric. In the next stage was the matriarchal concept of the social system. The means of production was guided by the female; reproduction, which was seen as miraculous during those days, was thought to be caused by the female alone. Traces of this concept are found in the Rig Veda, where Aditi is the supreme mother of the gods without a husband—in some instances she owes her greatness irrespective of the presence of a husband. In the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* the term *putra* illustrates a gender neutral meaning. This gave a philosophical sanction to humans, gods, and other beings to be ad-

dressed as *amritasya putrāḥ*. The sage Kashyapa has been mentioned in the Rig Veda (9.114.2), but unlike in the epics and in the Puranas there is no relation between him and Aditi, who in the tenth mandala is stated to be the daughter of Daksha. In the Shukla Yajur Veda Aditi is considered, for the first time, to be *viṣṇupatnai*, consort of Vishnu.<sup>34</sup> But even Vishnu is stated to be one of the twelve Adityas according to the Puranas and the later tradition. That in the Rig Veda the devas are named after their mother and not their father points to a very early tradition. But for the most part we see Indra and his cohorts gaining great importance over a handful of female deities. Indra is the raja. This refers to the time when the warrior group was well established. Protection and security was the main objective behind Rig Vedic prayers.

(To be continued)

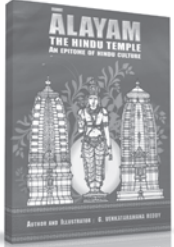
### Notes and References

21. Rig Veda, 2.1.11.
22. See *Rg Veda with Commentaries*, ed. Vishva Bandhu, Bhimdev, Amarnath, K S Ramaswami Shastri, and Pitambar Datta, 5 vols (Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute Press, 1963), 1.3–11.
23. See Shaunaka, *Brihaddevata*, 2.89–91.
24. See *Rg Veda with Commentaries*, 1.314–27.
25. See F Max Müller, *The Hymns of the Rg Veda in the Samhita and Pada Texts*, 2 vols (Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series, 1965), 1.48.
26. Rig Veda, 1.161.11.
27. *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, 10.11–12.
28. Rig Veda, 3.31.3.
29. Ralph T H Griffith, *Hymns of the Rig Veda* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 420.
30. Rig Veda, 1.162.22.
31. Indu Lekha, *Cognate Words in Sanskrit and Russian* (New Delhi: Pratibha Prakashan, 2007), 38.
32. *Aitareya Brahmana*, 1.3.
33. *Mahabharatam*, ed. Haridas Siddhantabagish, 43 vols (Calcutta: Vishwavani Prakashani, 1400 BE), 34.1755.
34. Yajur Veda, 29.60.



# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



**Alayam: The Hindu Temple  
An Epitome of Hindu Culture**  
G Venkataramana Reddy

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore,  
Chennai 600 004. Website: [www.sriramakrishnamath.org](http://www.sriramakrishnamath.org). 2010.  
vi + 128 pp. ₹ 110.

Sri Ramakrishna said: 'By meditating on God with form one speedily acquires devotion.' This precept is the essence of Hindu scriptures dealing with bhakti, and to a vast majority of persons a temple is a great help to realize this ideal, for '*Ālayam deva śarirah bhūtam*—Temple, in fact, represents the physical form (body) of the deity' (10). This and many other kinds of insights into the architecture of temples as symbols of Hindu culture are meticulously presented in this book through texts, sketches, illustrations, and figures. The history of India and that of the Hindus is also intertwined with so many invasions that their effect on culture is best shown in its architecture, especially in the temple complexes and styles of North and South India. All this is thoroughly covered by the author, along with the philosophic symbolism and significance of the location of temples in human settlements.

G V Reddy also successfully dwells on the role and influence of the plans of worship of other religions and points out the essential differences: temples did not develop merely as places of public worship but as places where God in various forms palpably dwells.

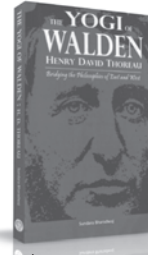
The Ramakrishna temple at Belur Math is conceptualized to show Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings of harmony, while considering also the idea of an all-round human welfare. Its design even takes into account the educational and philanthropic works carried out by the Ramakrishna movement. This is aptly shown in the concluding remarks and detailed sketches drawn by the

author himself on the various other Ramakrishna temples all over India.

In ten chapters G V Reddy has done a great service to both connoisseurs of Indian art and architecture as well as common people interested in having a general knowledge of temples by revisiting Hindu heritage through the eyes of Hindu experts.

*Swami Tattwajnanananda*

Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Shilpamandira



**The Yogi of Walden:  
Henry David Thoreau**  
Sundara Bharadwaj

Indus Source Books, PO Box 6194,  
Malabar Hill PO, Mumbai 400 006.  
Website: [www.indussource.com](http://www.indussource.com). 2010.  
xii + 223 pp. ₹ 195.

As a nation India has moved beyond post-colonialism into the realms of what today is termed as 'transculturalism'. The late twentieth century created a discourse, via Michel Foucault and Homi Bhabha, that saw history as a reaction to colonial hegemonic forces. Today the realities in erstwhile developed nations have changed, and many of the globally white belts are now speckled with people of South East Asian descent. What Rudyard Kipling once thought of as an impossibility, namely the clichéd dictum that the East and the West can never meet, has been erased through interactions on all levels. It is within this new context of a global world that we must interpret the works of Henry David Thoreau (1817–62). And Dr Sundara Bharadwaj does an excellent job in reinterpreting Thoreau as a man who not only bridged the gap between his own Christian context and the tenets of Hinduism, but also as a man who spearheaded a campaign that today is being revived as a 'back to nature movement'. The whole thrust

of Hinduism as a religion has been to find the Reality that moves all of nature and yet transcends it. Dr Bharadwaj clearly elucidates this connection of Thoreau and Hinduism: 'Thoreau's fellowship with birds and other creatures that made their home around Walden hut is worth mentioning. Citing *Harivamśa* ... he felt proud to say in *Walden* (57–58): "An abode without birds is like a meat without seasoning; such is not my abode"' (87).

This thorough acquaintance of the author with the primary texts of both Thoreau and Hinduism effectively support his argument proving Thoreau a yogi within the Indian tradition. And this transcending national and historical boundaries situates the works of Thoreau within the larger context of 'transculturalism'.

There are some points in this book that could have been better discussed. In the first chapter, titled 'Sanatana Dharma: A Treatise', and in the last 'Conclusion' Dr Bharadwaj makes reductive and simplistic comments on the meaning of dharma and *kama* respectively. In what seems to be naive and often repeated sentences he praises Max Müller as 'the foremost among Western Orientalists' (2), after seemingly expressing relief at the Western world's unlearning of 'the misconceptions about Indian culture and society' (ibid.). This smacks of a disregard to established theories of contemporary understanding of colonialism, the Orientalist Project—vide Edward Said—'transculturalism', and in between these the best-selling academic works of Antonio Negri on the nature of imperialism and empire-making—vide Negri and Hardt, *Empire*, 2000. I find Thoreau more of a Protestant coming to terms with his repressed desires within the subtexts of his works rather than him being a proponent of the concept of *kama* in Indian traditions. There exist numerous Indian treatises on the nature and pleasure of physicality, which our author fails to recognize in his book. This is not to say that what Dr Bharadwaj writes is incorrect, but what is presented here is insufficient for our times.

As it was mentioned, Dr Bharadwaj is well versed in both Thoreau and the Indian scriptures; this is illustrated by his numerous comparative passages from *Walden* and the Upanishads. Yet,

he entirely avoids present-day hermeneutics in interpreting Thoreau as well as the Indian scriptures. This might alienate a great part of the academic audience, who would also find an outdated bibliography and the lack of an index—a trifle off-putting. Even a cursory glance at the bibliography suggests that the book is written within the pre-Derrida, pre-Foucaultian style. This disregard for theory is the greatest danger that books written on Hinduism today present to a world as well as academicians well versed and expectant of firm theoretical bases in works of erudition.

Notwithstanding the reservations held against such scholars as Wendy Doniger by right-wing Hindu fundamentalists or the ethical works on the Talmud by Levinas and later by Martha Nussbaum, we must acknowledge that comparative theological and literary works coming out of India bridging two different traditions often fail at the level of metaphysics. General statements and selective quotations mar this otherwise superb comparative work. For example, on pages two and three Dr Bharadwaj suddenly rattles off quotations from the Zen Buddhist scholar D T Suzuki and then T S Eliot. He wants to show their admiration for everything Indian. While this may show the scope of the author's readings, such out of context quotations do not do justice to the existential truths of either Dr Suzuki or T S Eliot. The former remained an admirer of Zen, enticing the Trappist Thomas Merton into Buddhism rather than Indology, and the latter called himself ultimately a 'high Anglican' who saw Hinduism as a fulfillment of the Word made Flesh of the New Testament.

Yet any seeker of wisdom will find enough food for thought in this very well compiled book. The two appendices are really heartening, being one of the original letters of Thoreau and an annotated excerpt from his *Walden*. The book tries valiantly to bridge the gap between the East and the West and indeed appropriates the life of Henry David Thoreau within the Indian tradition of those seers who had experienced the radiance of the Golden-effulgent One.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay

Assistant Professor of English,  
Ramananda College, Vishnupur

# REPORTS

## ***Commemoration of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna***

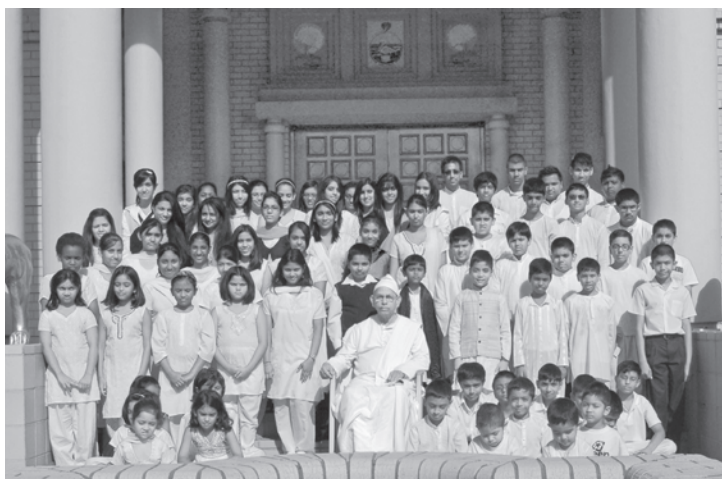
The 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated with great zeal by the following centres. **Durban**, South Africa: public meetings addressed by Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 27 and 30 April 2011; **Jalpaiguri**: public meetings, cultural programmes, and exhibition from 25 to 27 March; **Ponnampet**: spiritual retreat from 6 to 8 May; **Porbandar**: public meeting, spiritual retreat, and devotional songs from 23 to 29 May; **Rajkot**: public meetings, spiritual retreat, japa yajna, and devotional songs from 7 to 30 May.

## ***Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda***

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Cooch Behar**: youth conventions at Mathabhanga and Alipurduar Junction on 1 and 7 May respectively; **Visakhapatnam**: devotees' conference on 24 April.

## ***News from Branch Centres***

**Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata**, organized value orientation programmes to carry the man-making message of Swami Vivekananda to the youth at large through 207



*Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj in Durban, South Africa*

conferences held in 11 districts of West Bengal, in which approximately 39,000 youth participated from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. The institute also held 3 district level teachers' conferences attended by 765 teachers; one organization representatives' conference, in which 188 organizations were present; one central youth competition on speech, recitation, songs, and quiz held on 25 September 2010 and attended by 200 youth; and one central youth convention held on 21 November 2010, in which 1,200 youth delegates and 350 observers from 120 organizations took part.

On 18 May Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj inaugurated a building at **Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati**, that would serve as doctors' quarters and guest house.

*New doctors' quarters and guest house at Mayavati*





Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj declared open the extended dialysis wing at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow**, on 17 May.

The foundation stone for the proposed temple at **Ramakrishna Mission, Limbdi**, was laid on 27 May.

During the month of May **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh**, implemented a child eye care project in two schools in Panchkula, Haryana, in which 886 children underwent eye check-up—of these, 58 children with refractory errors were given spectacles free of cost.

The following centres conducted summer camps for children with programmes that included chanting, bhajans, moral lessons, yogasanas, and other activities:

Centre	Duration	Participants
Hyderabad*	22 April to 24 May	750 children (age 11 to 15)
Kanpur	22 to 29 May	125 children (age 9 to 16)
Ponnampet	17 to 24 April	120 students (class 10 to 16)
Pune	24 to 29 May	145 children (age 12 to 15)
Rajkot	2 to 27 May	76 students (class 7 to 13)

\* Special training for 100 parents on family values was also conducted during the period

## Achievements

Kunal Chawla, a student of the students' home at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh**, has secured 6th rank in the all-India IIT-JEE examination of 2011.

Professor Kingshook Biswas of the department of mathematics at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, has been awarded the Indian National Science Academy medal for young scientists for the year 2011.

## Relief

**Earthquake and Tsunami Relief** • **Nippon Vedanta Kyokai** (Vedanta Society of Japan) continued its relief work among the victims of the recent earthquake and the ensuing tsunami. In the second phase the centre distributed vege-

tables, fruits, and stationery items to the evacuees at Izumi Kominkan Shelter in Izumi City and at Nihon Univa Volunteer Centre in Iwaki City.

**Distress Relief** • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Chandigarh**: 340 assorted garments; **Vrindaban**: 1,200 kg rice, 1,200 kg flour, 300 kg dal, 300 kg mustard oil, 600 kg salt, 150 kg sugar, and 600 bars of soap.

**Drought Relief** • Under Sri Ramakrishna Jaladhara Project **Limbdi** centre completed desilting and deepening of three ponds in Surendranagar district during May, thus making the total number of such ponds 60 in the last nine years.

**Rehabilitation Relief** • A school building and a vocational training centre building at Parevada village—30 km from Rajkot City—constructed by **Rajkot** centre for the Madari (snake charm-ers) community were inaugurated on 28 May. In the state of Karnataka a total of 216 houses built for the victims of the October 2009 flood were

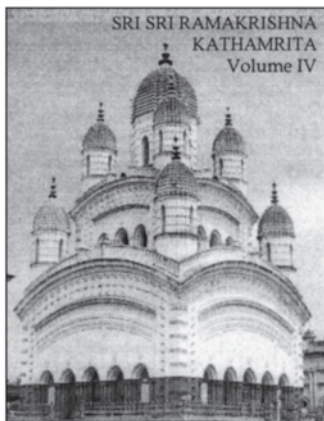
handed over to the beneficiaries in May. The details are as follows: (i) 143 houses, jointly built by **Belgaum** and **Mysore** centres in Sindhanur taluk of Raichur district were handed over on 27 May; each beneficiary

family was also given a kit containing 2 cooking vessels, 5 plates, 5 cups, 5 spoons, 1 knife, 1 ladle, and 3 bed-sheets; (ii) 70 houses built by **Belgaum** centre in Beeranagaddi, Gokak taluk, and Belgaum district were handed over on 29 May; (iii) 3 houses constructed by **Belgaum** centre in and around Belgaum were handed over in May.

### Handing over of houses by Belgaum centre







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- ❑ **Sri Ma Darshan** Vol. I to XVI Rs. 825 per set (plus postage Rs. 150)

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For this noble cause we need ₹ 20 lakhs. We earnestly appeal to you to donate liberally and let us make our Rural India a Vibrant Roaring India. Your contribution may be sent through cheque / DD/M.O. favouring '*Ramakrishna Math, Nattarampalli*'. The contributions can also be sent through electronic mode of transfer to our account No.31502956578 with State Bank of India, Branch Code-14619. After transferring the amount, kindly intimate us immediately without fail by emailing us at : [mail@srkmnattarampalli.org.in](mailto:mail@srkmnattarampalli.org.in) or over phone at 0417-242227 or 9629812221. All donations are exempt from the Income tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act.



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## APPEAL FOR RESTORATION

Ramakrishna Kutir at Almora, Uttarakhand, was founded at the behest of Swami Vivekananda by Srimat Swamis Turiyanandaji Maharaj and Shivanandaji Maharaj, celebrated monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Unprecedented rains and cloud burst in September 2010 at Almora have caused tremendous landslide, gorges, cracks and land-sinking in the Ashrama. The changed land contour has damaged the temple and other buildings. Engineers have suggested abandoning an old building and rebuilding another inhabitable one.

This Ashrama is mainly a retreat centre where monks, devotees, and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna come, live in a spiritual atmosphere, and get peace of mind. This spirituality is still alive and vibrant. The effect of Swami Turiyanandaji's intense austerities here will remain for eternity. Apart from the continuous welfare activities for the poor people of the hill regions and needy students, this Ashrama conducted relief work by distributing 5000 woollen blankets to the victims of the said calamity and devastation in Almora district.

We appeal to you to lend your helping hand to save the Ashrama. The restoration of land should be completed before the rainy season of 2011, and then the repair of the damaged buildings will have to be started. For this restoration project we need more than ₹ 2 crore.

Cheque/Draft may please be drawn in favour of '*Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora*' and sent to: Ramakrishna Kutir, Bright End Corner, Almora, Uttarakhand 263 601. The name of the donors of ₹ 2 lakh and above will be displayed in a prominent place if they wish so. All donations are exempt from Income tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

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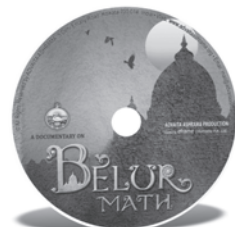
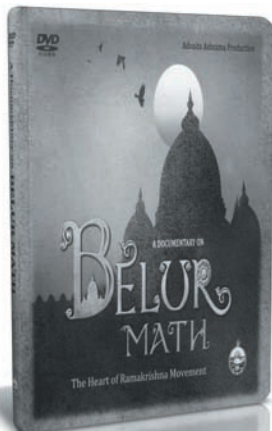
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